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**An Analysis of inter-school working in State-maintained Colleges in the Maltese Islands**

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# **An analysis of inter-school working in State-maintained Colleges in the Maltese Islands**

Mario Cutajar

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath  
Department of Education

May 2015

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- Policy- makers;
- The four College Principals from the selected State-maintained Colleges;
- All the Heads of Primary and Secondary schools from the selected four Colleges;
- A random sample of Primary and Secondary school teachers from the Colleges involved in the research.

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## **Abstract**

In October 2005, the Maltese Government embarked on a new phase of its national educational reform; primarily re-organising all State maintained schools into semi-autonomous regional colleges, sustaining partnerships between the schools, the parents and the wider community and re-structuring the education authorities into two Directorates. This thesis reports research into inter-school working that Malta, as in other countries, was actively promoting. The research aims were to:

- analyse the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint working within and by individual schools;
- explore the implications for educational leadership, governance and accountability within and between the institutions involved.

Case studies of four colleges were carried out. Key participants were interviewed and documents analysed. The cases were analysed individually and a cross-case analysis was also undertaken.

The classification and interpretation of the data focuses on the four key themes: - collaboration, (presented by the 2006 Education Act as a meta-concept and the basis for the success of the Colleges reform), educational leadership, governance and accountability. The data helped me to appreciate the importance of tradition, history and time which are necessary to understand how reforms impact differently on schools in general and school life in particular. The results show that in spite of a highly centralised system, we were used to examples of collaboration that had existed, albeit in informal and ad hoc ways. Many respondents felt that their school leaders lacked leadership qualities and failed to foster a culture of shared leadership. At the same time there was growing concern about the growing administrative responsibilities facing school management. There was consensus that the move to devolve greater responsibilities to the schools through inter-school working and the college system was a move in the right direction. This, in turn, was fostering an ethos of collective accountability within and across schools.



## **List of abbreviations**

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
ASAP	As soon as possible
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CCoH	College Council of Heads
DES	Directorate for Student Services
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DOI	Department of Information
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
ELC	Education Leaders Council
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre
EU	European Union
FACTS	For All Children to Succeed – A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta
FES	Foundation for Education Services
FTS	Foundation for Tomorrow’s Schools
HoS	Heads of School/Head of School
HoD	Head of Department
ISCED	International Standards Classification of Education
J.L.	Junior Lyceum
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
MEDC	Ministry of Education
MEEF	Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family

MEHR	Ministry of Education and Human Resources
MEYE	Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment
MEE	Ministry of Education and Employment
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
NCFA	National Curriculum Framework for All
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NMC	National Minimum Curriculum
n.d.	No date
n.p.	No page
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
P	Principal
PCE	Permanent Committee for Education
Ph1	Phase One
Ph2	Phase Two
PM	Policy-maker
PMP	Performance Management Programme
PQP	Principals' Qualification Programme
Pri.	Primary School
PS	Permanent Secretary
QAD	Quality Assurance Department
SBM	Site-based Management
Sec.	Secondary School
SMT	Senior Management Team
SSE	School Self-Evaluation

SSREC                      Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Education  
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T.                              Teacher

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.0 Educational Reform in the Maltese Islands

History corroborated the fact that throughout the existence of civilization, humanity had continuously striven to enhance its social and educational standards, an endeavour that had brought with it a culture of change that had remained ongoing and would continue for many years to come. Change was here to stay, forcing itself on us with substantial implications, moulding our achievements and failures. Even though we know that change is a journey fraught with uncertainty, as Fullan (2008) asserts, we go forward relentlessly.

Malta was no exception to this climate of continuous change taking place worldwide and in a number of areas, particularly in the educational sector. *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) called for the shift in decision making that saw its inception in the mid-1990s. The government sought to address the situation to adopt a more decentralized approach to policy making. During the past two decades one could see an unprecedented move to bring about radical changes to the way education was conceptualised and reformed. There was a shift from a highly centralised and elitist education system towards democratisation and placing the child first (MEYE, 2005). Bezzina (2010, p.6) argued that the stimulus was ‘to create a model of learning that permeates the whole system.’ The Government consequently identified networks (not a new phenomenon in the education sector worldwide but new to the Maltese Islands) as ‘the main organisational form which can give depth and scale’ (Galea, 2005, p.xi) to the extensive educational reform.

2005-2006 became a watershed year for Maltese Education. Significant in this regard was the seminal document *For All Children to Succeed – A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta (FACTS)* (MEYE, 2005), which introduced the education reform proposals. The seminal document indicated that the changes and reforms were meant to overhaul the Maltese Education System. It proposed:

- to group together all State primary and secondary schools into ten autonomous regional Colleges, with a three-staged implementation process;
- that all Colleges would have the possibility of generating new energies through College-based curricular control and resources, and greater technical and administrative support;
- the transformation of the Education Division into two complementary Directorates: one with support services role primarily for State-maintained schools and the other with a regulatory and quality assurance role for all schools in Malta;
- the most massive school rebuilding programmes in Maltese Educational history;
- to equip school communities with state-of-the art facilities for the provision of a holistic education focused on College/school-based learning.

In July of 2006 Parliament sanctioned *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006), which included the formation of the new Colleges and the two Directorates. In 2007 the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) signed a new education reform agreement. The

provisions of the agreement were to introduce new governance structures; more flexible relationships between institutions and sections; engage new staff to provide support and enhance services; and implement accountability features necessary to give the new Colleges a launching pad (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2007).

There appeared to be consensus among educational researchers (Connolly and James, 2006; DuFour and Eaker, 1998) that building a community of learners might be considered an important asset for intra- and inter-school networking because it gave rise to dialogue, communication and the eventuality of joint-working; that was collaboration. Senge (2006, p.10) claimed that ‘team learning is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations.’ Thus, when members of an organisation worked as a team they were learning together, and accordingly, stood to benefit. Senge’s (2006) claim, resonated with Ryder’s (n.d.) reflection on activity theory which maintains the importance behind individuals collaborating together to achieve a common objective. Senge (2006, p.10) also endorsed the significance of ‘*team learning*’ communities. When teachers and school leaders came together, when they embarked on a journey that fostered a culture of collegiality, they could very well be on the road to transforming their schools for the benefit of the students. Bezzina (2006, p.81) argued that ‘Educational reform networks are fast becoming an important alternative to conventional modes of teacher and school development.’ The beneficial significance of collaboration between teachers and school leaders found corroboration in research (Bezzina, 1988; 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lee and Smith, 1994; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995 cited by Veugeliers and O’Hair, 2005; Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003).

## **1.1 The Aim and Research Questions**

As an educator who had been working in the educational sector for over thirty years, I saw the reform and the changes taking place and more so the impact they were having on the stakeholders as an opportunity to personally engage as a researcher while the reform itself was unfolding. These were exciting times and whilst the reform was still in its embryonic stage I felt it provided researchers and policy makers with an opportunity to engage critically with questions that might otherwise remain unasked and unanswered.

As a result of this study I intended to provide a perspective for a better understanding of the Maltese college system. This perspective should not be a prescriptive one but a visionary one that would offer a contribution to knowledge, particularly to the field of education. Hopefully, it would contribute to the build-up of the necessary frameworks that could guide the practice of Maltese educators and provided insights for education reform elsewhere.

Engaging with the literature and the local debates about the reform brought up a number of concepts, which helped me shape the conceptual framework of the research, particularly:

- the objective of the Maltese government to change the education system in order to enhance its quality, together with the assumption that this transformation could be given depth and scale by the creation of networks of schools working together in colleges;
- the realities which the narratives of the interviewees brought to light;
- the benefits of joint-working at all levels in the education system as highlighted by the research literature.

When I developed the aims and research questions, I established the conceptual model of collaboration in a policy context that required joint working within and between individual schools as the primary theme. Within the context of such collaboration, the subsidiary themes explored were the implications for educational leadership and management, the implications for governance and governing, and the implications for accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved.

In my research intra- and inter-school collaboration were organizing meta-concepts, since my study focused on schools and colleges working together. In this study I used the terms intra- and inter-school collaboration because the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) encompassed provisions for collaborative work amongst the school practitioners, and for the individual schools to work together and maintain the practice of joint working. Although the title of my study embodied the phrase ‘inter-school working’ I felt that in order to achieve the inter-school working level one had to begin from within. Unless teachers and school leaders worked together within the environment of their school, they would find it extremely challenging to collaborate and conduct joint-working projects with other schools. Furthermore, at times I used the term networks, because that was how the colleges were initially referred to in Malta, but since schools were working together, that was actually joint working. The etymological derivation of collaboration was joint-working, co-labour. My meta-concept therefore was analysing collaboration /joint-working in the new Maltese colleges.

I hinged the findings of the research on one primary and three subsidiary research questions, which were:

Primary research question:

*What is the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools?*

Subsidiary research questions:

In the context of such collaboration:

1. *What are the implications for the leadership and management of the institutions involved?*
2. *What are the implications for the governance and governing of the institutions involved?*
3. *What are the implications for accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved?*

## **1.2 The Importance of the Study**

The study was deemed important because it:

- would give me an in-depth insight into the development of the networks;
- should place me in an auspicious position to formulate a conceptual analysis of this national reform;

- would provide data as to how different stakeholders would engage in collaborative ways to implement the reforms;
- would help me to analyse the development of local governance and the move from a centralised to a more decentralised system.

The study was a contribution to educationalists and future researchers in the hope of learning new knowledge on intra and inter-school working in State-maintained Colleges in the Maltese Islands. The characteristics of the study would be the first of its kind locally as it would focus on four important themes: networking and collaboration; educational leadership and management; governance and governing; and accountability relationships.

This study would not merely present an analytical perspective, but hopefully provoked academics and all stakeholders to seriously examine the validity of the existent nature of collaboration together with the implications of educational leadership, governance and accountability within the context of such collaboration. This study would seek to invite researchers to cultivate the art of exploration and enquiry vis-à-vis the performance of the current Maltese Colleges and to consider whether this novelty in Maltese Education was actually helping to provide quality education for all Maltese students, as stipulated in the forward messages of *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005).

I hope that this study would promote an understanding of networking and collaboration as well as the kind of leadership, governance and accountability relationships that would foster the mode of collaboration that was required for joint-working by individual schools, as sanctioned in the 2006 amendment to the Education Act. This study therefore aimed:

- to provide stakeholders with purposeful information that would help them engage in a critical way;
- to evaluate and fine tune practices for the success of this National College Reform;
- to achieve the overarching goal; ensuring that every child matters and every child would succeed.

### **1.3 Approach to the Study**

The study would primarily analyse data collected from the series of interviews that I had with a sample of policy makers, College Principals, school leaders, and school practitioners from the selected Colleges in the four case studies; observation sessions of Council of Heads meetings of the respective four colleges and reviewing official documents and reports. An analytical study of the claims, arguments and views of interviewed personnel would help me develop an understanding and a rich picture of the philosophy behind the kind of networks that had been proposed for the Maltese school context and which were now all in place. To establish the objectives for my empirical-analytic study I would seek to make an analytical critique of the collected data, which would hopefully help me to appreciate the potential and concerns that this new reform brought with it.

The analyses and exploration of the above-mentioned aim and research questions would be carried out in this study in short journeys through subsequent chapters. Following the introduction's section, Chapter 2 would present the contextual background of the study so that readers could

appreciate the Maltese context in which this study had been undertaken. This was followed by Chapter 3, the literature review, in which I considered the theories of collaboration in intra and inter-school networking, analysing particularly the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working by individual schools. I would also analyse the implications for the three other secondary themes (leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability relationships) in the context of such collaboration.

Chapter 4 explained the methodology design that was adopted for the research process and the collection of data. It gave an account of the sample of interviewees, the content of the questions, the time duration for the collection of the data and the location of the interviews for the four case studies. It also encompassed the ethical considerations that were adopted and how the data was analysed. I adopted a critiquing and reflective style that explored the underpinnings and assumptions of the method.

Chapter 5 presented the findings in line with the four key themes. Then Chapter 6 presented an analysis of the data on the existent form of networking, intra and inter-school collaboration and the practical implications for leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability relationships in the context of the ongoing form of collaboration, as argued and stated by stakeholders in the recorded interviews. This chapter articulated my interpretations formulated from the collected data, as I gained insight into how the interviewees perceived the development of the Colleges and related reforms. Chapter 7 presented my conclusions and recommendations based on the formulated conceptual analysis of this innovative reform for Maltese education.

The study was carried out respecting as far as was possible the documentation that was available as primary sources and the data collected as part of the study. The data was collected up to December of 2010. One had to acknowledge that since the reform was still on-going other developments could not be embraced in this analysis.



## **Chapter 2 Background and Context**

### **2.0 Introduction**

Reform and innovation are essential elements to the development of the economy and achieving national aspirations. Reforms and change are inevitable and remaining passive is not an option, as this could result in a regress in Malta's national educational level and our prosperity as a nation. The modern 'forces of change' in the new socio-economic order drive innovation and growth in education in their wake. Education is not an isolated sector. It is central to a country's future economic success and its long-term sustainability. A learning society's economic success depends on its ability to share ideas across disciplinary and organisational boundaries and the strength of its educational system.

The Editor (2007, p.9a), in the editorial made this observation: 'In a country where virtually our only resource is the Maltese people, education is fundamental to our economic well-being.' Other literature corroborated this: 'It has always been the prime duty of schools to educate young people to cope with the future' (NCSL, 2001, p.2 cited by Grech and Mifsud, 2008, p.4). The challenge for education was not the change per se, but how to bring about change while supporting tradition for innovation and continuity. Hargreaves (2006, p.230) stated:

The challenge that confronts them all is that as we try to create a more fulfilling, successful and sustainable future, we must always acknowledge the past, to preserve what we should from it, and learn from it whenever we can.

In this chapter I present the relevant context as is evidenced in practice when I conducted my study. I begin by introducing the concept of change and reform in the educational sector (2.0) followed by a very brief outline of the national milestones in Maltese Education (2.1). I then present an overview of the Maltese Education system since 1964 and how Maltese education has been undergoing reforms ever since (2.2). A review of the process that leads to the sanctioning of the State-maintained semi-autonomous regional colleges in the Maltese Islands (2.3) follows. I then focus on the local debate that ensued after the setting-up of the existing colleges (2.4). Attention is then given to the education reform of 2006 and the two educational sectors that it addresses (2.5).

### **2.1 National Milestones**

Malta's endeavours and achievements over the years mapped a notably successful historical journey. In the last five decades alone, we saw an island state with limited resources, in the middle of the Mediterranean, that had moved to independence (1964), the introduction of social benefits (1970s), to EU accession (2004), working and functioning in a globalised world and becoming a reference point for northern African countries, to mention a few milestones.

Maltese history demonstrated that as a nation our potential necessitated an educational system that is robust, stable and equitable. Consequently, education had been given its rightful importance on the political and social levels. Borg (2005, p.xvii) stated that 'Malta had always aimed high and achieved results where Education was concerned.' The major historical developments of Maltese Education since Malta became an Independent State were as follows:

- secondary education for all sanctioned in 1970;

- comprehensive education for the secondary sector introduced in 1972;
- compulsory school leaving age raised from fourteen to sixteen in 1974;
- the sanctioning of the *Education Act (Act XXIV of 1988)*, (Laws of Malta, 1988) whose provisions placed the onus on the State to provide compulsory education to all Maltese citizens so as to meet the needs of society, recognized the professional status of teachers and the introduction of School Councils;
- School Councils sanctioned in 1988; (Laws of Malta, 1988);
- the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) established for the first time in 1989;
- a Consultative Committee on Education set up in 1995;
- the new National Minimum Curriculum published in 1999: *Creating the Future Together – National Minimum Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999);
- the report: *Strategic Plan – National Curriculum on its Way* launched in 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2001);
- the first four pilot network projects in 2005;
- all Maltese State schools were clustered into ten regional colleges between 2006 and 2008;
- *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* ratified in 2006 (Laws of Malta, 2006);
- the Education Division restructured into two Directorates in 2006;
- *A National Curriculum Framework for All* (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012).

However, whichever way one looked at these developments, one could still pinpoint deficiencies, particularly where goals had not been achieved. Nevertheless, one had to appreciate how Maltese education had progressed and what it had achieved over the years.

## **2.2 The Maltese Education System: An Overview**

Independence initiated a number of revolutionary reforms that the Maltese Education sector has been going through ever since.

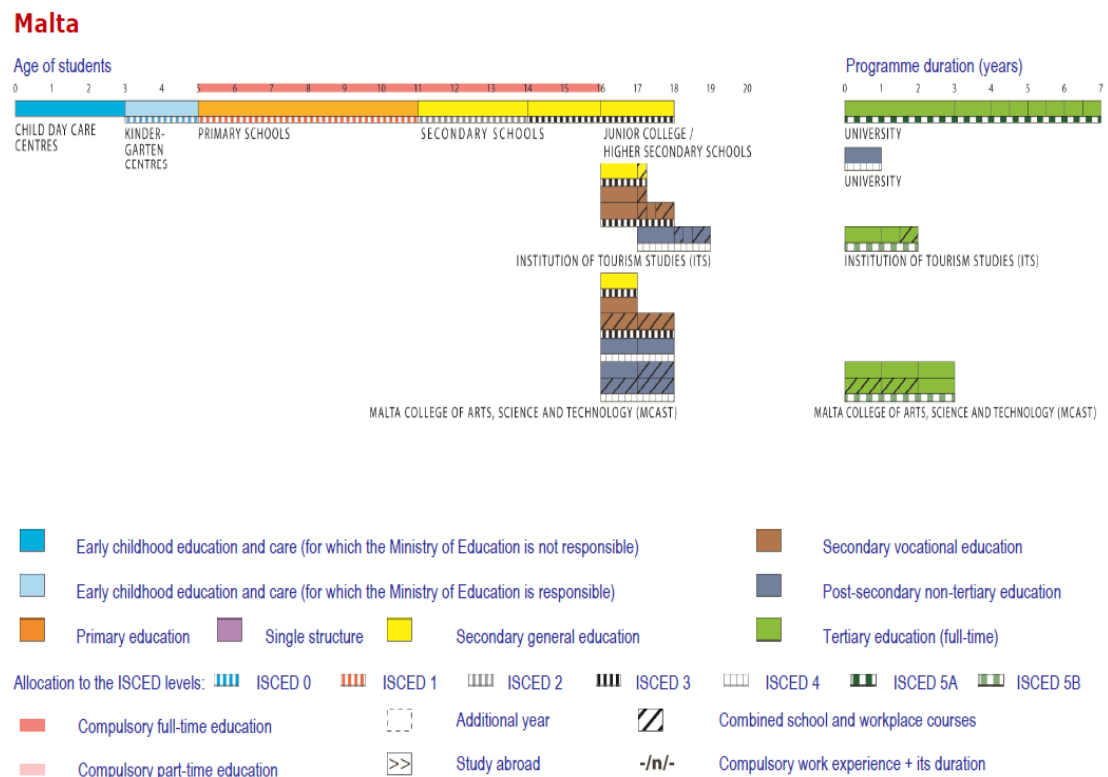
The debate and the developments that took place in the 1980s led to the transformation of the then two partite system into a tripartite one of State, Church and Independent schools offering all students residing in Malta, the opportunity to receive an education. Students who attended Independent schools paid fees whereas those attending Church schools were asked for a donation. Only those who attended State schools were free of charge.

The Maltese educational system had been, and to a certain extent still was, a centralised one, in that the Government had the right to establish the National Curriculum of study for all schools in

Malta and Gozo (Ministry of Education, 1999). Studies (Farrugia, 1992; Wain, 1991; Zammit Mangion, 1992) gave evidence of the highly centralised and bureaucratic characteristics of the Maltese state educational system. The Education Division, the principal sector of the Ministry, was responsible in terms of the *Education Act (Act XXIV of 1988)* (Laws of Malta, 1988) for the provision of an efficient and effective system of schools. The intent was to ensure education and training in areas relevant to the needs of Maltese society, without any distinction of age, gender, belief or economic means. The Education authorities also had to offer the individual the opportunity to develop his/her full cognitive, affective and operative potential for life.

Until 2010, when the 11+ national exams were abolished, the structure of the Maltese Mainstream Education system, together with its examination system followed very closely the British model (Sultana *et al.*, 1997; Zammit Ciantar, 1993; Zammit Mangion, 1992). Figure 1 presents a pictorial representation of the current national education system. All Kindergarten and Primary State schools followed a coeducational model, while all Secondary State schools were exclusively for boys or for girls.

**Figure 1.1:** The Schematic Structure of National Education System 2012/13



Source: Eurydice, 2013, p.7

## 2.3 The Road to State-maintained Colleges in the Maltese Islands

In understanding the early stages of the *Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) reform, it is important to point out that the existing state-maintained clusters of primary and secondary schools, which between 2005 and 2007 had been known as ‘School Networks’, are

presently identified as colleges. The Maltese State schools had been clustered into ten colleges brought together on a regional basis. These were similar to educational Federations in the United Kingdom.

Before the 1990s, the operations of State-maintained schools in Malta were largely dependent on policies emanating from the former Education Division. The constitution of school networks in 2006 required a shift towards a decentralized system. As documented by Fenech (1994), the road to this new form of educational democratization found its origin, as early as 1989, in a number of Ministerial pronouncements on the introduction of the decentralisation theme in educational policy.

1989-1990 saw the introduction of the decentralisation process within the Maltese education system. In 1994 a Consultative Committee on Education, with the remit to re-examine and revise educational policies and practices, published the report: *Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures* (Wain *et al.*, 1995). This report proposed the development of schools as learning communities which were to cater for the well-being of students, and which were to bring together the experience and expertise of teachers and parents for the benefit of the educational needs of the students. A significant educational landmark, which followed the presentation of this report, was the NMC document (Ministry of Education, 1999). This document laid down the kind of educational knowledge and skills that a child needed to acquire, and to grow up valuing democracy and solidarity. On a general note, the NMC gave substance to the concepts of collegiality, consultation, partnership and collaboration among students, educators and stakeholders within the parameters of the networking policy, as outlined in the *Strategic Plan – National Curriculum on its Way* (Ministry of Education, 2001). The NMC (1999) called for radical changes in the whole culture of philosophical and pedagogical practices.

In 2005, Galea, the then Minister of Education, Youth and Employment launched the networking reform policy document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) in which he stated that:

New educational research and the far reaching technological developments changing the world around us, however, make it clear the education system as we know it has reached its limits. It urgently needs renewal to remain relevant. (Galea, 2005, p.xi)

Such a statement emphasised the necessity of reforming a conservative and outdated education model to bring it in line with current developments taking place both locally and in other countries. In fact it was widely acknowledged that the traditional school system was no longer appropriate to take Maltese education into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and it had become clear that a change was essential.

*FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) provided proposals for an overhaul of the Maltese Education system that was meant to bring about a paradigm shift in local education. The whole notion was not to introduce a new model but to improve the existing one. Reorganizing and modifying the existent model required schools to work in partnership, share resources, jointly solve problems and create new practices for all children to succeed. The adjustment was to establish a strong orientation towards a collaborative mind-set that was meant to consolidate an effective collegial spirit. The changes were aimed at transforming the existing practice of teachers working mostly in isolation. Maltese state-maintained schools had for years worked in isolation as independent units and inculcated a culture that had led to teachers entrenching themselves in set ways and preferring to work on their own (Bezzina,

1991; 2009). It was within this context that the cultural change underlining the significance of team work and joint-working had to take place.

In 2006, the proposed policies of networking that were presented in a series of proposals in *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) and aimed at bringing fundamental changes in the way school and college practitioners synergized, related and collaborated were endorsed in the *Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006). Both official documents could be regarded as the precursors of reforms that had been set in motion in 2006, and which were still on going. The reform brought about by the Act of 2006 also advocated a change in educational governance, from a 'top-down' bureaucracy to 'communities' where parents and practitioners who work within them come together for the benefit of the learning child. Its suggested systemic transformation, which entailed a paradigm shift in mind-set and culture, became a working reality by the endorsed policies in the Act of 2006 that had been originally introduced in the seminal reform document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005).

Educational policy makers in Malta saw the growing move towards the establishment of networks, clusters or federations abroad as the way forward to enhance the quality of education, whilst at the same time acknowledging that there was no blueprint for an effective network (Bezzina, 2005). The education authorities recognized that the organization of networks in education was an almost worldwide phenomenon when they stated that 'there are now many schools, both in the U.K. and internationally, that benefit from working together as a network' (MEYE, 2005, p.38). Networking was going to be a ground-breaking experience for Maltese state schools and consequently, any form of change would not be easy. 'The task ahead is a mammoth one. It will involve collective commitment, discipline and effective network leadership' (MEYE, 2005, p.xxi). Convincing Maltese professional educators with years of experience, who felt and thought that they had been working within a conservative yet successful education system; to endorse the reform and adopt the proposed change as the way forward could be problematic. In effect, the transformation of the Maltese education system into a new framework provoked a vigorous and on-going debate among a diverse mix of participants (the Ministry of Education, the Shadow Minister, University academics, the Malta Union of Teachers, and stakeholders, – college pilot project co-ordinators (known as College Principals in 2008), Heads of School and teachers).

## 2.4 The Local Debate

Understandably, the highly innovative nature of the reform proposed by *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) was bound to produce a mixed reaction. Datnow *et al.* (2002, p.29) argued that:

As a result of differential power and positionality, the definition or meaning of events by various actors can become contested terrain. Different opinions can surface over the course of actions that lead to reform.

On the one hand, there were those who believed and advocated the reform, namely policy makers, the College Principals of the first four pilot network projects, and later on other College Principals, the education Directorates and independent individuals.

Sciortino (2006) claimed that in one of the colleges schools were working collaboratively to enhance staff professional development and pupil learning. Another college principal, in an interview conducted by Spiteri (2006, p.39a) maintained that:

The initial, all-important rationale of the Gozo College was to develop a culture of open dialogue among all stakeholders: pupils and students, heads, assistant heads, all teaching personnel, parents, social workers, clerical staff, minor staff, school and local councils, support services, ecclesiastical community...It takes a whole village to educate a child. The overarching aim was to develop a shared value system of co-operation and collaboration to enhance learning and teaching at all levels, first and foremost in each school and classroom but also in the whole community in a perspective of lifelong learning.

Felice Pace (2006, p.12c) in an article, which provided positive comments about the college system noted that the college networks' reform was '(t)he experiment which has grouped all the government primary and secondary schools as one cluster has already started to pay dividends.'

The complex character of the recommended changes and the challenges that Maltese educators would have to face in changing the way they worked started emerging in 2006. The changes and challenges provoked conflicting divergent stances amongst stakeholders, academics and the MUT. The unfolding debate highlighted a number of concerns particularly those that addressed:

- the lack of information shared with stakeholders; lack of involvement in the consultation stage of school leaders and educators; and the limited professional training stakeholders had undergone in preparation for the reforms (Malta Union of Teachers' Council, 2005);
- the lack of understanding of the implications behind such a reform; the impact that on-going change would have on the different stakeholders and what monitoring and evaluation systems were needed (Parliamentary Report, 2006);
- how schools as colleges would tackle collaboration (Busuttil, 2005);
- the way the college network system would tackle issues of underachievement and illiteracy (The Editor, 2008).

Other individuals and institutions publicly pronounced their scepticism and criticism about whether the objective of the networks would actually be achieved. Sceptics from different quarters of Maltese society – academics, the MUT and members of Parliament - expressed their reservations about the innovative Networks Reform for the Maltese Educational System. Busuttil (2005) wrote that the interviewee had claimed that simply introducing reforms and giving them legal status would not improve the teaching and learning process or help all children attending Maltese schools to succeed. The interviewee was also reported to have argued that networks would not address the core causes of underachievement in Malta and that the college reform was predominantly an organisational reform which needed to be complemented by reforms in other areas of the Maltese Educational System. In the same interview, the interviewee highlighted a number of causes hindering the fulfilment of the teaching and learning process and was reported to have claimed that 'while clustering should theoretically enhance collegiality, experience and ethnographic research show that such organisations can breed internal rivalry' (Busuttil, 2005, p.16a). This opinion, to a certain extent, found justification in the findings of a research study by Spiteri (2007, p.94) who stated that:

Among the findings, one cannot but fail to comment about the significant differences between Senior Management Teams and teaching personnel

perceptions of the networked college of which they and their school had been forming part for one scholastic year when questionnaires were administered.

The then Shadow Minister for Education, during the debate on the *Act to amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) was reported to have made the following Parliamentary Question:

With the colleges' system still in its very early stages, had there been time for a proper analysis before this draft legislation was moved? (Parliamentary Report, 2006, p.14a)

In its preliminary views and comments on the document FACTS (MEYE, 2005), the MUT Council stated that:

(p)roposals in the document do not provide evidence that the changes that are envisaged to be made to the present structures and leading to the setting of school networks will stimulate more value to pupils' learning. (Malta Union of Teachers' Council, 2005, p.8)

## **2.5 The Educational Reform**

In 2006, the Government presented a Bill in Parliament to amend the Education Act in order to sanction and execute the radical educational reform policies, proposed in the seminal document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005). Part II and V of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) encompassed provisions for the constitution of a Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and a Directorate for Educational Services (DES) and for the creation of the Colleges respectively.

### **2.5.1 The Education Directorates**

In giving legal status to the two Directorates, which had been in place since December 2007 and which replaced one Director General, the Ministry established future directions in creating more approachable and receptive support structures (Figure 2.2, p.33).

A restructured education authority enabled school leaders and educators to dialogue and participate in establishing future policies and methods, which enhanced the teaching and learning process where it mattered within schools in general and networks in particular. (Cutajar, 2007, p.9)

The mission of the DES, as laid down in the *Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) was threefold:

1. to provide the necessary resources (human and material) services and facilities required by the colleges and state schools to operate in a decentralised system of education;
2. to collaborate with the colleges and schools and reinforce inter-school and inter-college networking, collaboration and collegiality;

3. to form partnerships with parents, the wider community and non-State colleges or schools.

The ACT (Laws of Malta, 2006) provided for the creation of the DES whose mission was:

to ensure the effective and efficient operation of and delivery of services to the colleges and State schools within an established framework of decentralisation and autonomy. (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.6)

In addition, this same Directorate had to work ‘in constant collaboration with the colleges and schools ... and to encourage and facilitate their networking and cooperation.’ (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.7)

The concept of decentralisation and the issue of delegating more autonomy to the schools and colleges in the future was consolidated further in Part V of the Act, (Laws of Malta, 2006). It emphasised that:

The Minister and the Directorates shall promote the application of the principle of subsidiarity in the management and administration of the colleges, within a framework of decentralisation and autonomy of the educational operation and services given by the colleges and their schools according to the priorities, targets and national strategies adopted by the Government. (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.31)

At the time of writing this thesis, decentralisation and autonomy had only been partially achieved. Given the current educational local scenario, Maltese college and school leaders may find themselves having to balance a centralized system of control with a decentralized institutional management system. Literature, (Leithwood and Hallinger, 2002) argued that this was very often the case where the central government took centre stage in developing educational policies. Maltese colleges and their schools were experiencing what was known as site-based management (SBM), having been given a degree of latitude in managing financial and technological resources and implementing reforms decided by the authorities. This was in-line with certain provisions in the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) that sanctioned partial decentralisation with Central Authorities being recognised as the instigators of changes and development:

1. the function of the DQSE, as the regulator, whose mission was to scrutinise the educational programmes of the colleges and schools;
2. the ratification of the Permanent Committee for Education whose remit was to set-out national policy direction and the power of decision-making vis-à-vis Maltese education.

The current situation demonstrated that the decentralized reform of school self-management was accompanied by centralized systems of human resources, curriculum and assessment control. The Education Ministry’s committee with the remit of revising the National Minimum Curriculum had drawn up the draft of *The National Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2011). The process reached the consultative phase in December of 2011 when the draft was presented to the public and academics for feedback and suggestions.

The remit of the DQSE, as the regulator, was:



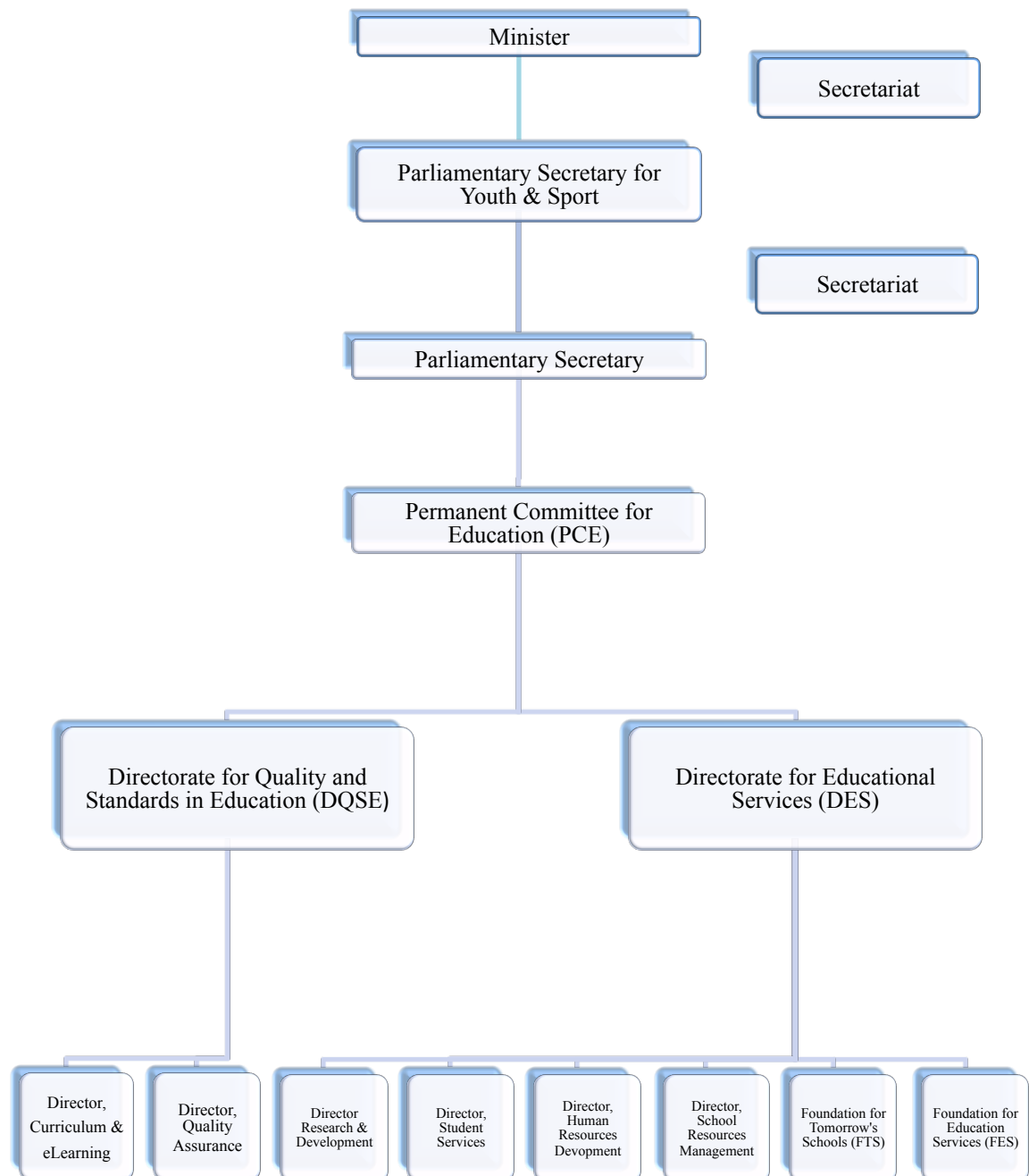
to regulate, establish, monitor and assure standards and quality programmes and educational services in the compulsory educational levels provided by schools, whether State schools or not, as provided for in this Act. (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.5)

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) also set out the functions and the setting up of the Permanent Committee for Education, presided by the Minister. Policy direction was given by the Permanent Committee for Education and the power of decision-making would remain first and foremost the jurisdiction of this same Committee. The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) stated that the committee was:

to discuss and evaluate the policy, the strategy and the direction and the developments in the education sector..., and monitor and follow the implementation of the educational policy and strategy adopted by the Government. (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.10)

**Figure 2.2:** The Schematic Structure of the Ministry and the Directorates

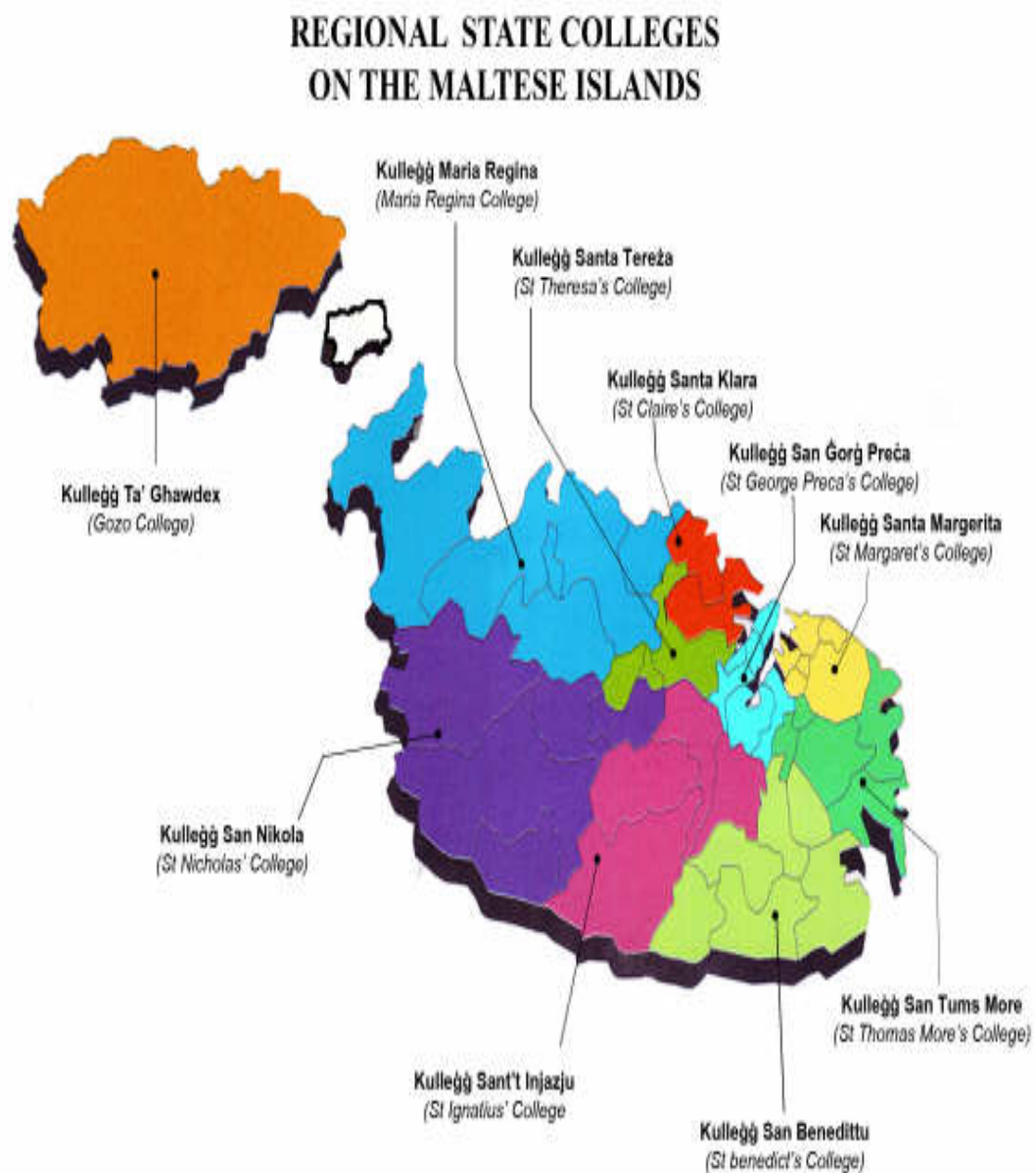
## Ministry & Directorates Structure



### 2.5.2 The College System

The central feature of the college system was the value and importance given to joint-working. *The Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) made provisions for the necessary legal framework for re-organising the existing kindergarten, primary, secondary and ‘grammar’ school-type junior lyceum state schools into colleges. The Act stated that ‘there shall be established those colleges...which shall network within them State boys and girls schools’ (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.26). Four pilot colleges were established in October 2005 and the full complement of 10 ‘autonomous’ regional colleges was in place by February 2008. The location of the 10 colleges is presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 2.3:** The Location of the 10 Colleges endorsed by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006)



Source: MEYE (2008)

The Laws of Malta, (2006, pp.28-33) established the governance arrangements and accountability structures of each college. The articles made provisions for:

1. a consultative College Board (not yet in place);
2. a College Principal, as the Chief Executive Officer of the college, held accountable to the College Board;
3. a Council of Heads, formed by the Heads of all the primary and secondary schools within the college, held accountable to the Principal;
4. a School Council composed of educators and parents whose chairperson is nominated by the Minister for Education and the Head of School acting as its secretary;
5. a Students' Council composed of students and chaired by the Head of School, or one of the members of the SMT team or a teacher appointed by the Head;
6. all members of the college involved in the education of their students to be accountable for their actions and teaching.

The college network system was aimed at bringing children from the ages of 3 to 16, together with the intent of providing an on-going system of support to students as they went through the schooling process. It also aimed to improve the transition of pupils from the feeder primary into the secondary schools that formed part of each school network, and to give the schools within a college the opportunity to work together autonomously. Consequently, it promoted dissemination of best practice and capacity-building in schools, in that it helped schools face and support change, and deal with ambitious and complex issues. It ensured that resources, experiences and best practices were shared, and the educational experience was no longer fragmented. The college system also provided schools with the required space and empowerment to make decisions and develop their syllabi as laid down by the National Curriculum and according to student needs. The system could very well help restructure and change the culture of educational organisations and systems.

## **2.6 Concluding Comments**

In this section I attempted to present a succinct yet comprehensive review of the background and context that led to the college reform. The college reform in the Maltese Archipelago is congruous with what was happening globally. In our globalised world the need to network in order to be successful was emphasised by many (see Chapter 3). Intra- and inter-school working, manifested in the current 10 colleges, was central to the implementation of the 2006 educational reform. The college model played a leading role in the overhaul of the education system and was one of the outcomes of collaboration between the Directorates and the colleges based on the concept of quality education for all students attending State schools on the Maltese Islands. The college system was intended to facilitate and support developments and changes that should take place within each college. The changes that might be unique to each college presented a diverse scenario but still able to address and achieve national goals.

Looking at all the different measures that encompassed this reform it became evident, especially to educators, that while we needed to change the system as quickly, as efficiently and as effectively as possible, we also had to be careful against a 'big bang' approach. The philosophy behind the present reform was evolutionary in nature rather than revolutionary.

The comprehensive review identified a number of critical themes that required further in-depth investigation, namely the issues of collaboration within a policy context that was being deregulated; the effect that this had on the areas of leadership, governance and accountability between different stakeholders.

The next chapter will consider the theories of collaboration in intra- and inter-school networking, analysing particularly the nature of colleges or school networks and collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working by individual schools and the implications for three other secondary themes (leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability) in the context of such collaboration. The discussion will encompass the conceptual framework of international and Maltese studies.

## Chapter 3 – The Literature Review

### 3.0 Introduction

The intention of Chapter Three is to engage with the literature that focuses on the primary key theme of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by the individual schools and the implications for the three subsidiary themes: educational leadership and management; governance and governing and accountability relationships in the context of such collaboration. The Chapter encompasses an analysis of the research conducted by leading researchers in the field of the aforementioned four key themes, engage with the debates that centre on them, and contains references to studies carried out in the local context. Such literature review has set a broad context within which one can understand the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working within and between individual schools in the Maltese Islands and the challenges in sustaining the reforms central to collaboration. Such discussion allows me to examine:

- theories around the four key themes (the primary theme of collaboration and networks; the subsidiary themes of educational leadership and management; governance and governing; and accountability relationships, and their implications in the context of such collaboration);
- the proposed model/s of grouping Maltese State schools into Colleges as presented in the seminal reform document *For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta (FACTS)* (MEYE, 2005), and the required form of collaboration envisaged to sustain them;
- how this conceptual model of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint-working within and between individual schools is in practice manifesting itself in the rationale of the college reform.

The conceptual framework of this study is presented in five sections:

- the introduction (Section 3.0), which presents the intent of Chapter 3;
- Section (3.1) explores some key theoretical perspectives;
- Section (3.2) addresses the theme of collaboration;
- Section (3.3) investigates the subsidiary themes of educational leadership and management;
- the secondary theme of governance and governing (Section 3.4) follows;
- accountability relationships theme is presented in Section (3.5);
- the chapter ends with an overall summary (Section 3.6).

### 3.1 Key Theoretical Perspectives

#### *1. Introduction*

The basic purpose of this section is to explore theories central to collaboration and networks. The study requires an exposition of certain theories for a better understanding of the centrality of collaboration, networks and networking to the research. The Actor Network, Activity, Social Capital and Communities of Practice theories will be explored.

The premise of this study is based on the transformation of the Maltese Education System into one that creates a new way of working based on the concept of intra- and inter-school collaboration (joint working). Intra- and inter-school joint working can be considered as the core concept of the reforms introduced since 2006.

The whole concept of collaboration establishes the notion of joint working and interactions between individuals and organisations (in this study schools). Interactions between individuals can be established within a network of contacts between the involved members. Hence a context is provided within which the ‘actors’ exchange and share ideas, discuss and work together. Consequently, the members and even organisations are connected to each other through the participating individuals. As a result of such interactions individuals are socialised into a group. When organisations and individuals work together, share their ideas and work they draw on their experiences and knowledge of others. They may also draw upon the skills and experiences that the participating members may have had with others.

Intra- and inter-school joint working (whether democratic or contrived) can influence the perception of the members of the group and possibly their connections, which can affect the network structures. Before investigating the literature relevant to the concepts of collaboration and networks, it is necessary to explore the key theoretical perspectives mentioned above.

#### *2. Actor Network Theory*

Actor Network Theory (ANT) is an approach to social theory and research originating in the field of science studies, which treats objects as part of social networks (Wikipedia, 2014b). Furthermore, ANT, which stems from Science and Technologies studies, suggests that the work of science is similar to other social activities (Ritzer, 2004). ANT also known as the ‘sociology of translation’ (Whittle and Spicer, 2008, p.611) emerged in the 1980s, primarily with the work of Latour. Translation is a central concept to ANT, which Ritzer (2004) claims is not only a process but also an effect. Ritzer (2004, p.2) adds that ‘translation is the process of establishing identities and the conditions of interaction...’ Ritzer (2004, p.2) continues to explain that ‘As effect, translation orders, and produces society and agency, nature and machine.’

According to Whittle and Spicer (2008) the term ‘actor’ can represent both human and non-human. They add that ‘organizations, according to ANT, are understood as networks of heterogeneous actors’ (p.612). Additionally, an actor is valued and examined in terms of the strength of the association with other members or entities. Whittle and Spicer (2008), add that ANT appeals to researchers who conduct organization studies. As evidence, they (2008) give a list of such organization studies, amongst which they cite Fox (2000) when referring to communities of practice.

ANT helps researchers ‘understand how relationships can be organized and stabilized to create a durable and robust network (Whittle and Spicer, 2008 citing Callon 1991). Furthermore, ANT offers

a framework for the pragmatic examination of the organizing process (Whittle and Spicer, 2008, p.611). Networks that show concurrence due to translation are said to exemplify ‘a high level of convergence’ (Ritzer, 2004, p.2). In the case of networks, Ritzer (2004) argues that networks need to be sustained because they are subject to change and introducing new actors. The actors need to remain faithful to the network and acknowledge that it is required and needs to be sustained.

There is also criticism around ANT. Whittle and Spicer (2008) have criticised ANT because ‘it cannot provide a critical account of organization’ (p.611). They (2008) add that ANT sees pre-existing structures (such as power) as emerging from how the actors work within the network. Hanseth *et al.* (2004, n.p.) state: ‘Ant is sometimes criticized for claiming (or assuming) that humans and technologies are essentially the same.’ In their counter arguments, Hanseth *et al.* (2004) argue that actor networks, whether human or non-human (such as telecommunication technology) are different, particularly in roles the actors play.

### 3. Activity Theory

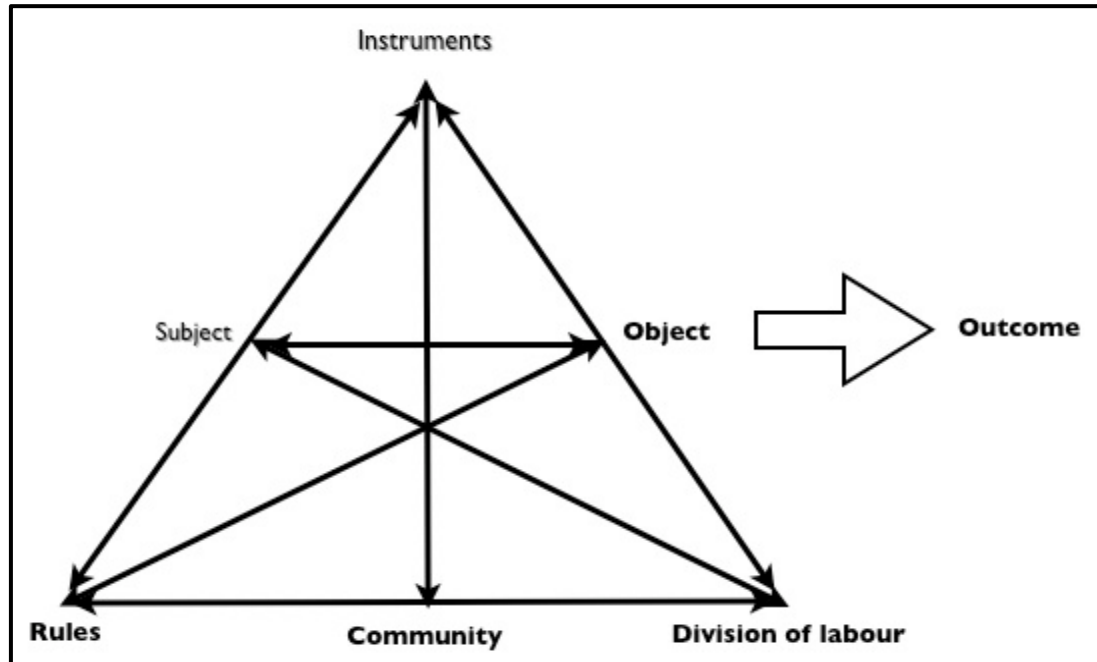
Activity Theory (AT) was developed by the Russian psychologists, particularly Vygotsky in the 1930s (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 1997). They add that the basic premise of AT is goal-directed activity undertaken to achieve a goal, and the elements of activity can alter as conditions change. AT is more of a descriptive meta-theory or framework than a predictive theory that considers entire work/activity system (including organizations, etc.) beyond just one actor or user (Wikipedia, 2014e). Hence, human participation and creativity plays an important role in activity theory based on an early interpretation (Engeström 1988, cited by Holt and Morris 1993, p.98) of the definition of activity as ‘systems of collaborative human practice.’

AT has been advanced by Finnish organizational analyst Yrjö Engeström. As developed by Engeström, AT ‘is a means of both analysing and intervening in organizational process’ (Holt and Morris, 1993, p.97). Engeström developed an activity system’s model that helps in understanding how a wide range of factors work together to impact an activity. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the activity system model developed by Engeström.

The model suggests that AT is said to be a set of basic principles that include a ‘hierarchical structure of activity, object-orientedness, internalization/externalization, tool mediation and development’ (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 1997, n.p.). The implication of Engeström’s (1999) model of activity system implies that in order to reach an ‘outcome’ certain ‘objects’ (e.g. experiences, knowledge, and physical products) need to be produced. Artifacts (documents etc.) and a community (e.g. school, organization) facilitate human activity or the activity. An activity normally also features division of labour. Furthermore, the community, which may be part of other communities, may impose rules that affect activity. The subjects that are grouped into communities work as part of the community to achieve the object.



**Figure 3.1** Engeström's (1999) Activity System's Model<sup>1</sup>



Source: Engeström (1999)

Note: Object-orientedness is an element that indicates the objective of the activity system. While internalization is the element that highlights actors engaged in the activities, externalization refers to the social context; to the fact that all the actors are involved in the activity system. Tool mediation indicates the artifacts or concepts that the actors in the system use. Tools are influenced by culture and change with accumulating experience. The way tools are used condition the accumulation and transmission knowledge. The division of labour denotes the division of activities among actors in the system and the rules identify the guidelines regulating activities in the system.

#### *4. Social Capital*

The term 'social capital' is said to have been in use from about 1890 but gain currency in the late 1990s (Google Ngram Viewer, n.d.). The term social capital, lends itself to multiple definitions, interpretations and uses, which in turn led to multiplicity of definitions (Wikipedia 2014d). The term has been linked by many (e.g. Ferragina, 2012 and Jacobs, 1961) to the aspects of: social cohesion, personal investment in the community and its value of networks.

The modern social capital conceptualization, which also created a fora for debate highlights the importance of collectivity to build generalized trust and the importance of individual free choice that help to create a more organized society (Ferragina, 2012). Bourdieu (1986, p.248) defined the concept of social capital as:

(t)he aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.

Hence, the concept of social capital has been transformed to an attribute of collectives. Hence collective action becomes an indicator of increased social capital. Furthermore, social capital will

facilitate cooperation and mutually supportive relations in communities, which will help members gain information and skills.

Although literature highlights the positive consequences of social capital, contrariwise Portes (1998) claims that the same mechanisms appropriable by individuals and groups as social capital can have less desirable consequences. He identifies exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedom and downward levelling norms as four negative consequences of social capital. Further negative consequences of social capital can be seen in the possibility that individuals can use social capital to advance the prospects of their own career, instead of furthering the good of organisation. Finally, whether social capital has positive or negative consequences depends entirely on how the individual members of the community use social capital.

### *5. Communities of Practice*

The term of the concept Communities of Practice (CoPs) that was coined by Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Jean Lave had been previously evident in learning theory (Wenger-Trayner, 2006). He (2006, p.2) states:

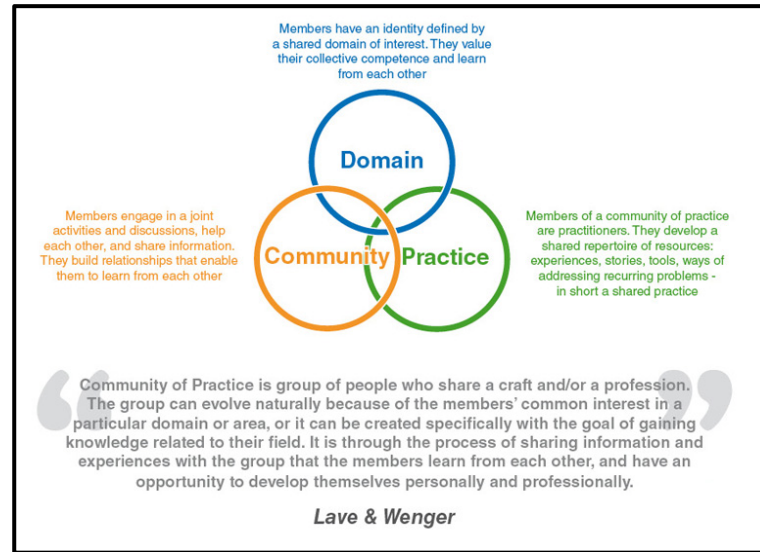
The term ‘community of practice’ is of relatively recent coinage, even though the phenomenon it refers to is age-old. ...A growing number of people and organizations in various sectors are now focusing on communities of practice as a key to improving their performance.

He (2006, p.2) adds that CoPs, which are everywhere and embody familiar experiences, are formed when by people participate ‘in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour...’ Consequently, CoPs can be referred to as collaboration constellations that are either self-organized or controlled by individuals (Wikipedia, 2014c). Furthermore, the evolution of the CoP group can either happen naturally (the effect of the common interest of the members) or created specifically to gain knowledge.

According to Wenger-Trayner (2006) a CoP is characterised by three elements (Fig. 3.2):

- **the domain** – provides the general area of interest for the community;
- **the community** – is formed when the members interact and learn together, which creates the social fabric since the members interact with each other;
- **the practice** – is the specific focus around which the community develops, shares and maintains its essence of knowledge.

**Figure 3.2** The Three Elements that Characterize Communities of Practice



Source: ([www.socialserviceinstitute.sg](http://www.socialserviceinstitute.sg) n.d.)

Furthermore, Wenger-Trayner (2006) in his introduction lists a variety of activities (such as solving problems, coordination and synergy, discussing developments, visits and requests for information) that help to develop CoPs. The concept of CoP has been adopted by various organisations because of its potential to increase organization performance (Lesser and Storck, 2001).

Collaboration has been said to help CoPs to grow well and that seasoned members of CoPs tend to foster a more collaborative culture (Sveiby and Simons, 2002).

The four above explored theoretical perspectives, which can be said to be relevant to collaboration and networking, will help me understand, articulate and critique the areas under study; particularly when the recent publications indicate that AT 'is proving a useful tool for studying work settings' and 'collaborative activity' (Hardman, 2007, p.53).

### 3.2 The Primary Theme of Collaboration

Section (3.2) investigates the literature around the theme of intra- and inter-school collaboration, and by implication the role of networks. Its objective is to present a review of relevant literature. This review will also look into the conceptual understanding of the Primary Theme of Collaboration, which is raising challenges and implications on the development and the sustainability of the colleges in the Maltese Islands. Section (3.2) encompasses a number of sub-sections presented as follows:

- 3.2.1 presents the opening remarks that highlight the content of Section 3.2 vis-à-vis Collaboration and why the concept of the Networks is visited;
- 3.2.2 focuses on the concept of networks, where I explore:
  - working definitions around the term networks;
  - the characteristics of networks;
  - networks in education;
  - educational networks and the Maltese context;

- networking facilitates collaboration
- 3.2.3 explores inter-school collaboration;

### **3.2.1 Opening Remarks**

The theme of Collaboration is central to this study since the primary research question addresses the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. When examining the literature central to collaboration, I will also discuss the concept of networks and educational networks because of the:

- association that literature (for example, Bezzina, 2008; Chapman and Fullan, 2007; Slatter, 2007) has established between collaboration and educational networks;
- perception of the Maltese Educational Authorities regarding the linkage between collaboration and networks as presented in the ‘Executive Summary’ section of *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005, p.xxi):

Networks of schools,...will respond creatively and collaboratively to the needs of each ‘whole’ learner. No single school can hope to provide the diversity, flexibility or an economy of service that the creation of networks involves.

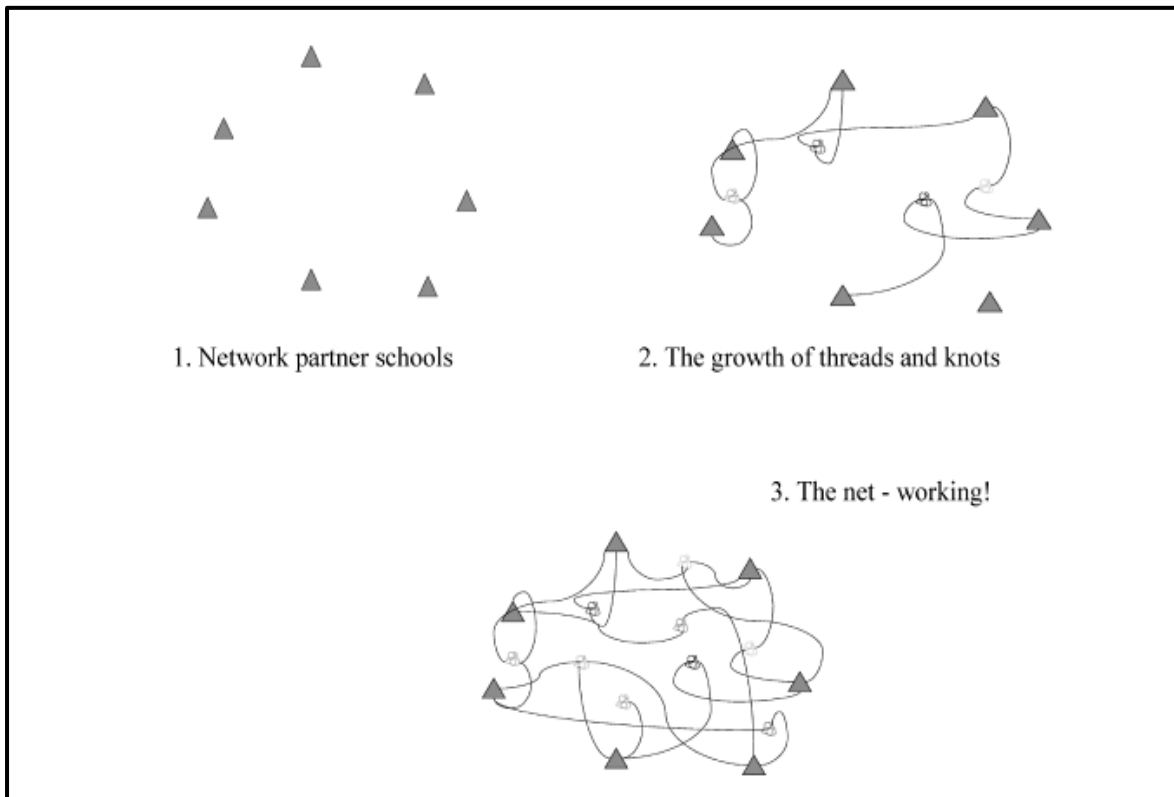
### **3.2.2 Networks**

#### *1. Working definitions around the term networks*

A network, which loosely means ‘an interconnected group or system’ (McLeod, 1994), is not a new phenomenon. An early interpretation (Sparrowe and Liden 1997 and Brass and Krackhardt, 1999, cited by Borgatti 2003, n.p.) suggested that ‘(n)etwork theorizing has emerged in virtually every area of organizational inquiry, including leadership...’ Similarly, Hadfield and Chapman, (2009) use the metaphorical phrase ‘plasticity of the term *network*’ (p.2) to highlight the application of the word network to various phenomena. Additionally, literature (Kogut, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 1997; Rowley, 1997) continues to show that network research has been gaining momentum. Such attention to networks can be the corollary of the fact that ‘(t)he world is becoming a networked environment’ (Church *et al.*, 2003, p.5).

In the widest sense of the word, a network can be described as an extended group of organisations with shared interests or concerns, who interact and remain in formal or informal contact for mutual assistance and support. Church *et al.* (2003, p.16), in their working paper claim that ‘(a) network is based on the relational’ and use the image of threads, knots and nets (Figure 3.3) to show the central parts of the network and how individuals joint work to realise a common activity. According to Church *et al.* (2003) pursuing a joint activity gives strength to the network.

**Figure 3.3** Threads, Knots and Nets – A Model for Networked Learning<sup>1</sup>



1. The triangles in the figure represent units in the network, which for the purpose of this study are individual schools. The threads between them signify the relationships with a purpose, communication and trust. The knots symbolise the activity the participants do together; what joins them.

Source: Church *et al.* (2002, p.17)

Church *et al.* (2003) also claim that the term network, which has formally ‘...become the modern organisational form’ (p.2), acquired a broader and more diverse meaning than mere groups or systems of interconnected people or organisations. Mitchell (1969) cited in Bienzle and Jütte (2008, p.2) defines a network as a ‘specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons.’ Similarly, while highlighting one of their many benefits, Hopkins (2000a, p.1 cited in Black-Hawkins, 2004, p.43) defines networks as:

...purposeful social entities characterised by a commitment to quality, rigour, and a focus on outcomes. They are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change.

Carter and Sharpe (2006, p.1) define a network as ‘...groups or systems of interconnected people and organisations (including schools)...’ Grandori and Soda, (1995, p.184) describe a network as ‘a set of nodes and relationships which connect them...’ Similarly, Castells (2010, p.501) defines the concept of network as ‘a set of interconnected nodes. A node is the point at which a curve intersects itself.’ Additionally, Castells (2010, p.501) presents networks as dynamic structures that can ‘expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network...’ This echoes the work of Church *et al.* (2003).

Veuglers and O'Hair (2005), in their analytical conceptualization of networks, identify an affinity between school networks and communal structures. They argue that: 'School networks emerge from our knowledge of communal structures and their impact on learning' (2005, p.2). Hadfield and Chapman (2009, pp35-37) present a number of 'network structures' that range from the simple to the 'idealised' ('hub and spoke network', 'a nodal network' and 'a crystalline network') to demonstrate the network of schools' structures. Furthermore, Veugelers and Zijlstra (2005, p.38) claim that '... networks are strong instruments for linking professional development and school development, and for bringing about educational change.' Chapman and Fullan (2007 p.209) argue for networked learning when they maintain that:

...we should push ahead with collaborative and networked learning approaches because they provide a potentially viable solution to the top-down/bottom-up dilemma.

All the above references, central to networks, highlight the notion of people coming together. The idea of people forming a community of learners resonates Sergiovanni (2006, p.115) who argues:

Community provides the theory and the framework for schools to use to strengthen their commitment and efforts toward improving connections, coherence, capacity, commitment, and collaboration.

## *2. The characteristics of networks*

Hannon (2004) argues that networks are impacting on the activities of families, governments and businesses as they are now the most significant logistical set up of modern times. These definitions emphasize the implied association between two players or more and suggest that the linkage between the stakeholders is advantageous because it will serve as a channel for an exchange of information or goods between the affected players. Networks embrace the common basic feature of communication that can lead to collaboration. However, in the light of certain literature one asks: Is collaboration alone enough to create the needed synergy in the group? In this regard Slater (2006) claims that collaboration is only part of the equation that can create synergy among the various stakeholders. She maintains that fruition from networks and collaboration relied mainly on the members of the organization and the degree of involvement that they are given by the organization in its quest to achieve its objectives. The fruition of networks relies heavily on the level of 'faithfulness' that individuals bring to the network (Whittle and Spicer, 2008) and the level of 'stability' that is nurtured by the individuals (Callon, 1991, cited in Whittle and Spicer, 2008).

The nature of networks can be influenced by area, the social, political and historical setting in which networks function. In the financial sector we hear and read about the networks of the worldwide financial flows, (Castells, 2010). In the political arena of the European Union we have the networks of the Councils of Ministers and European Commissioners (European Commission Website, 2007). One also finds the multimedia networks or the communication networks of the mobile, telephony, computer and the internet. Communication networks have impacted social behaviour to the extent that researchers have even coined terms to describe society as the 'Wired Society' (Maring, 1998) or the 'network society' (van Dijk, 1999)

## *3. Networks in education*

Literature (Hargreaves, 2003b; NCSL, 2004, 2005; Richmond, 1996) shows that the notion of networks has found its niche on the educational scene and that schools stand to gain. Moreover,

Bienzle and Jütte (2008); Lieberman (1999); Stoll and Fink (2003) suggest that educational networks produce change and improvement in schools.

Bezzina (2006) when focusing on the characteristics of networks in education claims that networking can entail elements of intra- and inter-school collaboration, interaction, connection, giving and receiving support, sharing resources and ideas. Additionally, while Chapman (2008, p.404) argues that networks foster the sharing of ideas, he adds that 'policy-makers consider networks to be important because they can increase the pool of ideas available to individuals.' To this effect, Bezzina (2006, p.81) contends that 'networks are becoming popular instruments for both professional development and school development'. Sergiovanni (2006) corroborates Bezzina's (2006) statement that networks are gaining currency. Sergiovanni (2006) also claims that bringing together the ideas and commitments of a variety of people, who have a stake in the success of a school, is crucial. Naturally, as pointed out by Chapman and Fullan (2007) school networks are there for the benefit of all the students, and the success or otherwise of a network system is very much dependant on their achievements.

Research acknowledges that the study of school networks is a varied field of enquiry. Authors, like Goldring and Shapira (1993); Michael *et al.* (1994), explore the degree of responsiveness of schools to the responsibility that society has designated to them. Others, (Hargreaves, 2003b; Hopkins, 2000a; Little, 2005; Richmond, 1996; Stoll and Fink, 2003) provide evidence that networks may have the edge in helping schools meet the responsibilities accredited to them by society. Finally, networks have been recognised as '... purposeful social entities...' (Hopkins, 2000, p.1). Consequently, literature on the subject (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1999; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993) contends that networks have partly gained currency because they have made teaching and learning in schools relevant to the demands of contemporary societies while, bolstering and fostering new *raison d'être* that produce change and improvement in schools.

Other literature (Ainscow and Howes, 2007; Chapman *et al.*, 2010; Hopkins, 2001 and West, 2010) also sustains the claim that networks support educational change and reform. Additionally, Black-Hawkins (2004) acknowledges the potential of networks in education. She highlights a dominant objective and two correlated reasons why stakeholders should promote the formation of linkages at an organisational level. Black-Hawkins (2004) presents a detailed review of the literature on researching teachers, schools and school networks. Her study gives a representation of the different views on the concept of inter-school networking and other institutions. She reiterates the inherent power and empowerment of networks which has been expounded by the current related literature. She claims that:

...the overriding intention of all school networks is to improve, in some way, the experiences of students and staff. Within this overall framework, there are two related reasons why members of schools choose to get together in this way. First they share a set of purposes regarding the educational improvement they want to bring about and second, they believe that these purposes will be most effectively addressed by working collaboratively as a network rather than as separate institutions. (p.49)

Additionally, other authors (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Bryson and Einsweiler, 1991; Connolly and James, 2006; Gray, 1989; Huxham, 1996; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998) draw attention to the need for many organisations, including schools, to network in order to be successful.

The concepts of network and networking in the educational sector have established themselves so convincingly in the global educational arena that besides attracting the attention of researchers (Bezzina, 2005, 2006; James, 2007; James *et al.*, 2007 and MEYE, 2005), they have also led to the initiation of a host of largely network-based partnerships and programmes, such as:

- in 2005, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) launches a school-to-school network project (involving a substantial number of schools) to augment the existing body of knowledge and theories on networks and networking (NCSL, 2005b in Stott *et al.*, 2006);
- in 1988, the German Network of Innovative Schools launches a programme that has the brief to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between schools for the purpose of school improvement and reform;
- in 1998 the nation-wide ‘Good Hope’ Programme in Portugal set out to encourage autonomy and experimentation through a process of producing research on emerging good practices and supporting the work of teachers and schools (OECD, 2003).

The German and Portuguese projects were forms of professional development training schemes for the members of the Education Networks in Germany and Portugal. Furthermore, Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) present a comprehensive illustration of network experiences in the United States. Additionally, Lieberman (1996) analyses the experiences of one networked learning community over the first year of its existence. She writes about the atmosphere of trust and support that is created and how networkers contribute and gain access to learning.

*a. Challenges around educational networks*

The above examples help us to appreciate the role that intra- and inter-school networks are playing in education and how they can lead to school improvement and improve student learning. However, we have to remain prudent particularly when Chapman (2008) argues that researchers have ‘questioned the value of school-to-school networking’ (p.405). Hence, we must remain vigilant and not become complacent because networking can also have consequences and the same networks can impede their own development (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009). Sammons *et al.* (2007) demonstrate a degree of cynicism, when they discuss the link of networking to student learning and improvement. They (2007) argue that such link

...has only weak empirical support and that any links are likely to be indirect and to operate in combination with other features and policies intended to promote improvement. (p.233)

Additionally, Bezzina (2006, p.89) argues, ‘networks in themselves’ give rise to tensions, that ‘involve personal conflict and organizational disequilibrium.’ Chapman and Fullan (2007, p.208) recommend that we regularly ‘take stock and re-examine purpose, strategies and impact’ to be prepared for the eventuality of conflicts. Evaluating our practices as reforms are introduced becomes a critical component in the reform process itself. Slater (2006) emphasises this point further by highlighting the importance of planning and ensuring that actions taken are effective and do address the problems identified. She (2006, p.216) argues that:



Change efforts in educational enterprises are enacted usually as partnerships, cohorts and networks; action occurs without assessing whether the solutions are effective for the problem and often the expectations of success do not coincide with the treatment.

Hadfield (2007) points out, that we need to be cautious of the various ‘tensions’ that can exist or created through the actual networking. One of the issues linked to the concept of networks, is the required form of leadership. He notes that there exist tensions that centre round the needed form of leadership for school networks, particularly when ‘...the very nature of network makes it difficult to define who its leaders are’ (p.260). Hadfield (2007, p.260) adds that when ‘researchers of networks...look at the leadership literature...they can struggle to connect appropriate leadership models to their particular view of a network.’ He also contended that the emergent concerns are compounded further by the dearth of empirical research on the concepts of leadership and networks. In tandem with other research, Ainscow and Howes (2007) also demonstrate that networks do create tension among participants. Thus, the formation of networks is not enough. Attention needs to be given to building partnerships, giving network leaders the right skills to deal with network tensions and assessing change reforms.

Appreciating that educational reform and change presents complex challenges to the individual stakeholder and society; we can begin to understand both the small and big picture. In turn, we realize the larger significance of educational change (Fullan, 2007). Furthermore, literature (Foreman, 1999; Fullan, 2007; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2006) claims that the course of educational reform is intricate and can cause tension among its stakeholders. Consequently, research is needed to provide insights into the implications of educational reform and change. The importance of research is highlighted by what Thorne (2011, p.182) wrote:

Any educational system which is attempting to transform itself in the way that the Emirati, more specifically the Abu Dhabi system, is attempting to do, must additionally set in place a research base in order to evaluate current practices and inform future policy changes.

#### *4. Educational networks and the Maltese context*

Change and development require the support of research and literature to provide innovative reform with depth and scale, notably their compelling purpose and relevance to the particular field. The report, *Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures* (Wain *et al.*, 1995) proposes the transformation of Maltese schools into learning collaborative enterprises working in partnership with others to enhance the quality of pupil learning, teachers' professional development, and school-to-school learning. It advocates a change in the Maltese Educational system.

Like their international counterparts, local researchers delve into the various aspects and areas synonymous with networking and networks to evaluate and analyse current practices and inform future policy changes. Local research on networks, networking and related themes is undertaken by an eclectic mix ranging from established educational researchers (Bezzina, 1988, 1999) to individuals in the process of furthering their studies.

Among local researchers, Bezzina (2005, 2006, 2008) writes extensively about networks and collaboration, and acknowledges the significance of networks to school reform:

Today more than ever before, we do appreciate that building a community of learners is essential to any school reform effort (Bezzina, 2008, p.22).

*An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) endorses a new administrative model. It focuses on networking, collaboration and change which Fabri (2010) describes as a system-wide reform. Other local research (Spiteri, 2008) also shows that the process of change at the micro-level (the school/ College) can lead to large scale reform at the macro-level (the national level). To achieve this everyone needs to be an agent of change, including teachers. Working together can make a difference because both failure and success can be experienced collectively (Bezzina, 2006; Louis *et al.*, 1995 and Rué, 2005).

### *5. Networking facilitates collaboration*

Educational studies (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003; Bezzina, 2005; Lieberman and Wood, 2004) show that in collaborative school cultures, networks facilitate collaboration and that networking and collaboration have beneficial effects on relationships, reducing isolation and leading to joint improvements in practice (Connolly and James, 2006; Hopkins, 2005a; Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996;). However, although networking can facilitate collaboration and promotes collaborative practice, yet networks have distinct characteristics to the point that collaboration may exist independently of networking and one can have a network without actually any joint working. One asks: Is there any value in calling that structure or system a network, if there is no joint working? Conversely, if there is joint working, is there any value in calling that joint working relationship a network? Regardless of how one may seek to distinguish between collaboration and networking, to determine whether they overlap and if they do, to what extent, research contends that when schools form networks they have an opportunity to collaborate, to draw on a pool of resources that might not otherwise be available. Accordingly, Church *et al.* (2003) state that '(a) network has its primary functions that of linking, co-ordinating and facilitating joint work' (p.6).

Consequently, one objective of networks is to bring together practitioners in specific thematic areas to create organisational frameworks for intensive collaborative practice (Rudd *et al.*, 2004; West, 2010). Additionally, Chapman and Allen (2006) contend that joint working values diversity among team members in the pursuit of common or shared objectives. Actually, teachers in schools have diverse and extensive professional expertise which can be shared in order to meet the complex circumstances synonymous with the teaching profession, the intricate needs of students (particularly in a differentiated classroom) and all that benefits pupil advancement. As Roberts and Pruitt (2009, p.160) note:

With the increasing focus on the need to differentiate learning opportunities for students, it is clear that the learning community model can provide an avenue for shared teacher learning and collaboration around the curriculum and instruction issues that arise in the differentiated classroom.

Lieberman and Wood (2002) argue strongly in favour of networking because it offers the school practitioners the opportunity to share their knowledge, exchange ideas and grow through the sharing experience. Such opportunities contribute to the creation of professional learning communities that are constantly exploring new ways of enhancing their practice and the quality of student learning. Roberts and Pruitt (2009, p.173) attest that collaboration is a fundamental driver for pupil progression, when they claim that:

Through collaboration, groups of teachers work together for the improvement of instruction. ...The essence of learning communities is people working together for improved student outcomes.

### **3.2.3 Inter-school collaboration**

#### *1. Introduction*

Literature (Calabrese, 2006a; Connolly and James, 2006; Dickerson, 2011 and Hadfield and Chapman, 2009) shows that the promotion for stronger inter-school collaboration has become central to recent education reforms, because working collaboratively underlines improvement (Hargreaves, 1994). In this section I review literature that deliberates on the key theme of inter-school collaboration and examine what collaboration is, its benefits to schools and the challenges that it raises. This review is by no means comprehensive, given the vastness of the area, but serves to give a clear review of the field. Section (3.2.3), after a brief introduction, examines a number of key issues:

- definitions around collaboration and collegiality;
- the collaborative endeavour;
- the benefits behind collaboration;
- the importance of collaboration in schools as learning communities;
- collaboration versus isolation;
- tensions and challenges when establishing intra- and inter- school collaboration;
- collaboration between schools and the wider community.

#### *2. Definitions around collaboration and collegiality*

Much has been written about what ‘collaboration’ is, and it is clear that the term can mean very different things to different individuals. (DfES, 2006) which contends that collaboration among secondary schools can take a number of forms, seems to resonate Cook and Friend (1993, p.421) who maintain that ‘(w)hen teachers say they collaborate, they may mean many different things.’ Additionally, Connolly and James, (2006, citing Huxham, 1996) contend that ‘...there is no agreed terminology’ (p.71) about collaborative practice.

However, the term collaboration, in its various forms, (Rutherford and Jackson, 2007) and which can lead to different interpretations, generally refers to joint work for a common goal or shared purpose (Paisey, 1981 and Slater, 2006). *The Macmillan English Dictionary* (Anon, 2002) defines collaboration as ‘the process of working with someone to produce something’ (p.265). Also, *The Macmillan English Dictionary* (Anon, 2002) defines ‘joint’ (an adjective and only before a noun) as ‘involving two or more people or done by them together’. Hence one is able to recognise a lexical association between ‘collaboration’ and the term ‘joint working’ since both refer to people or organisations working together. For this study, ‘collaboration’ and ‘joint working’ will be used interchangeably. Furthermore, Friend and Cook (1992) cited by Cook and Friend (1993, p.422) when defining collaboration (joint working) refer to ‘interpersonal collaboration’ as ‘direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal.’ West (2010, p.96) defined collaboration:

as two or more organisations – here schools – that may otherwise be natural competitors, choosing to work together towards a common goal by sharing knowledge and resources and coordinating their activity and efforts.

The above references and definitions, central to collaboration, highlight the notion of people working together, performing an activity directed at an object. Such collaborative activity and its object-orientedness resonates one basic principle of Activity Theory (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 1997).

Literature (Calabrese, 2006b; Shinnars, 2006 and Slater, 2006) writes about partnerships between tertiary educational institutions and secondary schools and that these partnerships succeed by effective collaboration. Additionally, Calabrese (2006a, p.170) in particular, shows how ‘social capital is at the heart of these partnerships as well as its attributes of bonding, bridging and linking.’ (Calabrese, 2006b, p.177) suggests that ‘(e)ffective partnerships are often the result of collaboration...’ Additionally, Connolly and James, (2006, p.71) claim that for them, ‘...the notion of collaboration subsumes working in partnership’, and it is often used interchangeably. However, Connolly and James (2006) do establish a distinction between collaboration (flexible set of intra- and inter- working arrangements involving organisations and individuals) and partnership (formal inter-organizational extending over a period of time).

The term collegiality, widely used in various sectors (Wikipedia, 2014a), basically describes relationship between colleagues and working together. An earlier interpretation (Lieberman and Miller, 1984 cited by Hargreaves 1991, in Bennett *et al.* 1992, p.80) suggested that as a result of collegiality ‘teachers can learn from each other, sharing and developing their expertise together.’ Campbell and Southworth (1990, p.62) claim that ‘(c)ollegiality could mean different things in different schools and with different colleagues.’ According to the *Cambridge Dictionaries Online* collegiality ‘describes a method of working in which responsibility is shared between several people.’ Brundrett (1998, p.305), visiting collegiality in a school setting, states that ‘collegiality can broadly be defined as teachers conferring and collaborating with other teachers.’ Chapman (2015) claims that the sharing of existing knowledge can have the potential of creating new knowledge. He adds that such collegial enterprise ‘provides a network within which social capital can be built up’ (Ainscow and West, 2006, p.315 as cited by Chapman, 2015, p.49). Literature (Day, *et al.*, 2008; Hargreaves, 1992; Roberts and Pruitt, 2009 and Stoll and Fink, 2003) also shows that academics interested in collaboration visit also the concept of collegiality, since both are said to promote professional development and school improvement. An early interpretation (Fielding 1999, cited by Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p.20) suggested that one has to consider collegiality when discussing the theme of collaboration because collegial relationships enrich collaboration and networks. Hadfield and Chapman (2009) write about ‘Fielding’s inclusive view of collegiality’ (p.21) and argue that in studying school networks Fielding’s form of ‘radical collegiality...underpins the reasons why many practitioners engage in school networks’ (p.21).

Although collegiality and collaboration tend to be considered as symbiotic concepts, Chapman (2015) differentiates between the two. He considers collaboration, a process that ‘involves schools working together to address particular problems or challenges’ (p.49) and collegiality a process that ‘involves a wider and longer-term relationship, between schools and teachers’ (p.49). Furthermore, one needs to be alert so that collegiality is collaborative and not contrived. Working relationships in collaborative cultures are voluntary, spontaneous and persuasive across time and space. Contrived collegiality is much more administratively regulated, compulsory, fixed in time and space and predictable (Hargreaves, 1992).

### 3. The collaborative endeavour

A number of authors (Bezzina, 2006; Chapman, 2008; Lacey and Ranson, 1994; Preedy, 1999) argue that collaboration can foster and consolidate collegiality and this leads to major improvements in current practices at all levels of education, specifically in the quality of teaching and learning and the

overall school climate. Connolly and James (2006) claim that collaborative practice notably impacts education to the point that it has been entrenched in education policy for England, Wales, and Ireland; but limited in Scotland. Moreover, Connolly and James (2006) add that because the process of teaching and learning has become extremely complex, practitioners need to be committed to joint working – collaboration – if whole-school improvement is to be achieved and sustained. They refer to a number of research studies to support their claims. Connolly and James (2006, p.74) also claim that ‘(p)rofessional practice in schools and colleges is widely acknowledged to be a collaborative practice.’

When discussing the issue of professional development Connolly and James (2006, p.75) claim that ‘continuing professional development in schools is being sustained by notions, such as ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998). Lave and Wenger (1991) maintained that when a group works collegially the group is setting up a community of practice. They add that in sharing information and experiences, the members of the group develop. Johnson (1990, p.178), in her study of teachers and their work, found that:

The teachers made it clear that continuing collegial interaction benefits both them and their students... It encourages cooperative approaches to school change. It promotes high professional standards and a more coherent instructional experience for children.

When teachers do not work in isolation but interact with each other, observe others at work and share their good practice there is a marked improvement in teaching and learning. When teachers transform their work into a collective endeavour rather than an individual enterprise, they improve their professional teaching practice (Lieberman and Miller, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1989). Such claim seems to resonate an early interpretation of the conceptualization of the term ‘activity’ (Engeström, 1988, cited by Holt and Morris, 1993, p.98) which suggested that ‘(a)ctivity defined as “systems of collaborative human practice” becomes the generator of a continuously emerging context.’

Connolly and James (2006) highlight tension inherent in collaborative practice in education. They maintain that collaboration in education has become an area of debate and research in academic educational studies because it has been recognized as a necessary strategy to enhance teaching. Considering that ‘collaboration is challenging’ (Slater, 2006, p.222) sustaining and keeping in perspective the collaborative objective is crucial to the cause of change. Thus, teachers and school leaders who constantly take stock of their work maximise their efficacy. This is consolidated by James’s (2007, p.33) claim that ‘...all adults who work with pupils in schools should be reflective practitioners to optimise and improve the quality of their work.’ All educators have the potential to reflect, to assess their teaching and to make the necessary adjustments. They bring to their organisation what they know best and work at nurturing it through good and sincere collaboration. All teachers have the common goal of educational development and of effectively enabling their students’ learning and achievement. Pupil progression is therefore the fundamental driver of collaboration.

#### *a. Collaboration and relationships*

In collaborative school cultures educational studies have continued to show that networks facilitate collaboration and that networking and collaboration have beneficial effects on relationships, reducing isolation and leading to joint improvements in practice (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003; Bezzina, 2005; Connolly and James, 2006; Hopkins, 2005; Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996; Lieberman and Wood, 2004). James and Connolly’s (2000) statement that: ‘Increased openness to collaboration within and between schools is a correlate of improved practice in schools’ (cited in Connolly and James, 2006,

p.70) continues to underline the importance of creating and sustaining collaboration among teachers and schools.

In the day to day work of successful schools distinguished by ongoing synergy, collegial interchanges and collaborative endeavours (Sergiovanni, 2006) occur amongst school practitioners at different levels:

- teachers collaborating with Heads of School;
- teachers engaging in professional dialogue with other teachers;
- teachers working with students.

The present day paradigm of inter-school networking to enable collaboration is advocated by various studies on the subject. O'Hair *et al.*'s (2000) view, that '...teachers learn best by sharing ideas, planning collaboratively...and reducing the isolation encountered in most schools' (cited in Veugelers and O'Hair, 2005, p.1) is reinforced by Stoll and Fink (2003, p.142) who state that '(i)solated schools miss out on the rich interaction with peers in other schools.' Additionally, Richmond (1996, p.217) contends that 'What is achieved in collaboration must be greater than what any of the members ... could have achieved individually.'

*b. Inter-school collaboration and the human factor*

There is both research and anecdotal evidence that shows that people may be suspicious or cautious in embarking on school-to-school collaboration (Chapman *et al.*, 2010). People need to be comfortable and clearly aware of what is going on, how the collaboration is going to work and who is going to lead such initiative. The human factor whilst being the strongest factor may also prove to be the most challenging dimension. As noted by Bezzina (2006, p.162):

the opportunity to come together really brings out the real character of people. Difficulties arise as people seek to work together that can lead to diversified opinions and eventually tension...

Bezzina (2006, p.162) argues that dealing with people becomes 'challenging and psychologically demanding'. Ultimately the test of successful change depends on the level of acceptance, engagement between participants and creating a balance between old and new processes and constructs.

*c. Trust is central*

Literature (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009; Stoll and Fink, 2003 and Roberts and Pruitt, 2009) indicates that trust is one of the characteristics that strengthens collaboration, particularly because of the involvement of the human factor. Given the human factor, people can find it difficult to exchange and discuss content central to teaching and learning. Roberts and Pruitt (2009) claim that '(t)rust is an essential factor in building the high-quality relationships needed to foster collaboration in schools'(p.51), and '(w)here trust exists teachers demonstrate a greater willingness to collaborate...' (p.51). Hadfield and Chapman, (2009, p.152) argue that 'trust is the key driver of positive relationships. Trust is both the lubricant and the glue of relationships.' Learning communities that demonstrate successful collaboration suggest the presence of the right conditions for trust to develop (Roberts and Pruitt, 2009).

The factor of trust is said to be one of the attributes that nurtures and sustains social capital (Calabrese, 2006b). According to Calabrese (2006b, p.175):

In general, social capital describes the networked reciprocal relationships between and among people and between and among groups based on trust and built on a set of shared values on norms.

Literature, (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009 and Roberts and Pruitt, 2009) acknowledge that building relationships on trust is rather challenging. When trust is lacking schools can become a force for exclusion and not inclusion (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009). Additionally, Roberts and Pruitt (2009) consider trust an essential attribute for building relationships that they set out a set of 8 tips that can help school leaders build trust with their stakeholders. They add that for school leaders need to develop the proper conditions that can help to develop trust among the members of the learning community.

#### *4. The benefits behind collaboration*

Through collaborative practice, practitioners of professional learning institutions share good and bad practice and this can very well inspire their own thinking and improve their approaches thus enhancing the standards of the educational institution (Johnson, 1990). Collaboration – joint working – can enable school educators to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and to map their way forward in an increasing professionally (Esera, 2002) informed frame of mind.

A collaborative culture can equip educators with skills to respond to innovative policies and to engage in on-going development. When members of an educational institution establish a collaborative system, they are committed to supporting one another's initiative and to sharing expertise and experience. Teachers working together can generate and enhance their knowledge. Their work becomes collaborative rather than individualistic. The learning environment can benefit from close ties and the formation of links. Collaboration is a motivating force, which stimulates those involved to engage in practices that cultivate and maintain their partnership (Peterson, 1994). Sergiovanni (2006, p.120) argues that:

One characteristic of successful schools is their ability to organize around and to effectively use collaborative cultures. These cultures are the backbone of dynamic learning communities that bring leadership and learning together. This joining of the two is the strategy not only for the day by day work of schools but for launching change initiatives and for continuous improvement.

##### *a. Professional diversity is beneficial*

Collaboration – joint working – is also the interactive process that enables teachers to work together as equals and engage in shared decision-making towards mutually defined goals even when these can be attained by diverse methods. Senge (2006, p.232) captures the significance of professional diversity, within the context of a shared vision, with his salient observation: 'Even when people share a common vision, they may have different ideas about how to achieve that.' Whilst Senge (2006) argues that there is an upside to diversity in a team, he believes that 'in great teams conflict becomes productive' (p.232) because there is ongoing learning for the members of the group. Thus collaborative practice among school practitioners also brings into play the concept of diversity (Roberts and Pruitt, 2009) and that it is deemed by researchers to be a positive attribute. Roberts and Pruitt (2009, p.168)

captured the notion of multiplicity of thought among the members of a team in their observation on collaboration in learning communities by claiming that: ‘Collaboration in learning communities means that people will increasingly be working closely with others who are very different from themselves.’ One advantage of such diversity is that it can give every member a voice and the opportunity to bring a different perspective to the group. Such diversity in collaboration resonates Whittle and Spicer’s (2008, p.612) claim that ‘(o)rganizations, according to ANT, are understood as networks of heterogeneous actors...’ (Senge (2006, p.232) attests that differing views among the members of a collaborative group are ‘critical for creative thinking’ and therefore beneficial.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991, p.49) underline this and also show that in schools where a collaborative culture is the *modus operandi*, ‘the individual and the group are inherently and simultaneously valued.’ In such an environment teachers engage in professional dialogue and in collaborative activity around school and classroom issues knowing that ‘teaching is a very complex profession and formative in nature’ (van Velzen *et al.*, 2009, p.60). Collectively, teachers in schools have diverse and extensive professional expertise to meet the complex needs of students, impact the outcomes of their schooling while continuing to grow professionally. Ensuring that schools have individual expertise is important. What needs to be further explored is whether collectively teachers can impact on student learning much more than can be achieved when working in isolation. Sergiovanni’s (2006, p.120) claim that: ‘There may be lots of smart people in schools, but we will not have smart schools unless their knowledge is aggregated’ can help us to acknowledge the importance of educators coming together in different ways and setting up a ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to enhance existing practices and to improve themselves both professionally and personally.

### *5. The importance of collaboration in schools as learning communities*

The notion of undertaking a typically creative intellectual activity by sharing knowledge and learning, and by consensus building has become the worldwide *raison d’être* for developing levels of collegiality and sustaining a collaborative culture, particularly in schools. The arguments found in the literature, (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992; Jones, 1994 and Lieberman *et al.*, 1988) advocate for reforms and practice that motivate synergy and collegiality as this leads to dissemination best practice and capacity-building in schools. Such reforms have been shown to enhance the professional development of school educators, particularly teachers, by facilitating their access to resources, ideas, technical assistance and community support. Brighouse and Woods (1999, p.83) argue that:

In successful schools, the staff have thought together what constitutes effective teaching and learning in their particular context, based on a set of core values and beliefs, and they continue to speculate how they might improve their practice, involving pupils, parents...

Whilst it may be argued that the process of functioning together to reach a collective goal distributes workloads and risks amongst the members of the group yet it also enhances their professional development. Collaborative practice in school communities brings people together and consequently resonate the notion of ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998). International literature on collaborative networks (Hopkins, 2000b; Kahne *et al.*, 2001 and Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996) has given tangible proof that collaboration is a ‘win win’ phenomenon where each member of the group has a role to play. Collaboration implies that ownership of a solution is shared equally by all the members and this maximises success rates. No one loses; no one gives up anything in favour of another, everyone supports the outcome. School communities are conducive to this approach, being by their very nature:



- Inquiring communities where principals and teachers commit themselves to a spirit of collective inquiry as they reflect on their practice and search for solutions to the problems that they face
- Collaborative communities where members are connected to each other for mutual benefit and to pursue common goals by establishing a sense of felt interdependence and mutual obligation
- Communities of practice within which the individual practices of teachers are **informally** connected to each other in such a way that a single shared practice of teaching begins to emerge.

(Sergiovanni, 2006, pp.103-104)

This concept of synergy in schools is further addressed in other literature, which offers more or less similar conclusions about the benefits of collaboration. James *et al.*'s (2007) research, based on an in-depth study of 18 primary schools in Wales, concluded that although the students came from a difficult home and social environment, their attainment in national test results was relatively high. Their findings highlighted the fact that a culture of collaboration among teachers was a contributing factor to the pupils' high achievement. In addition, Rutherford and Jackson's (2008) two-year research of the Birmingham Collegiate Academies presents an evaluation of a new model for collaboration among secondary schools. The authors argue for collaboration and its contribution to raising school standards and help to solving the everyday problems of the schools in an era of ongoing change.

The sharing of resources, good practice and working collectively for a common goal can empower school practitioners to innovate, adapt and improve their performance. Chapman (2008) contends that networking and collaboration have engendered satisfying results, particularly in struggling schools. Moreover, it has been acknowledged that fostering a collaborative approach to learning enables schools to build links with like-minded educational institutions and the professional personnel within them (DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2007 and Roberts and Pruitt, 2009). Collaborative practice thus becomes context specific, since it is directed at identified group needs and targets, hence espousing the notion of 'activity theory' (Engeström, 1988).

#### *a. Collaboration and effective leaders*

Inter-school collaboration research (Day *et al.*, 2008; DuFour and Mattos, 2013; and Hoerr, 2013) shows the pivotal role of school leadership and the importance of having effective leaders. In a case study conducted in Malta, Bezzina (2006) highlighted positive outcomes of capacity building and shared leadership. The study showed that the head of school was a determining factor in creating a culture of collaboration. Although leadership is crucial to fostering and sustaining networking and collaboration, Hadfield and Chapman (2009) identify specific qualities for network leadership. They contend that network leaders will work with their peers and 'are expected to lead without formal power or authority over their colleagues;' (p.75). In addition, commitment by all professional stakeholders to a spirit of enterprise needs to complement the appropriate form of leadership so that collaboration is nurtured and sustained. The individual or a small group cannot do it alone. In any reform process the parties concerned will need to believe in the paradigm of change and be empowered and committed enough to own it. Commitment generates the energy to progress. According to Senge (2006, p.205), 'A group of people truly committed to a common vision is an awesome force.'

## 6. Collaboration versus isolation

Considering the existent literature on collaboration and isolation (see below), it appears that these themes have lend themselves to diversified schools of thought. Internationally researched literature (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989) has shown that although educational reforms have brought about progress to educational systems and their institutions, the realities of the classroom still show the teacher working on his/her own. Roberts and Pruitt (2009, p.7) claim that: 'Traditionally, teachers work alone in their classrooms, where they create a learning environment for up to thirty or more students at a time.'

As Lortie (1975) points out teachers become physically isolated. Goodlad (1984) takes the argument a step further as he claims that the classroom environment motivates teachers to work independently. In the day by day classroom practice teachers appear to be working in isolation having to rely on their own judgement when taking decisions, and on their own knowledge when planning the way forward for their students. Likewise Fullan (1995, p.34), whilst corroborating the above, acknowledges that teaching lends itself to isolation in stating that 'teaching has long been called 'a lonely profession ...' Sergiovanni (2006, p.120) significantly remarks that: 'Despite the importance of collaboration, in most schools teaching is regarded as an individual practice.'

Whilst acknowledging that teachers work mostly in isolation we need to appreciate the fact that in today's networked world it is difficult for one individual to possess enough problem-solving skills to resolve all issues alone. Working with someone can produce far richer results than working on one's own (Carter, 1997; James *et al*, 2007 and Stoll and Fink, 2003). Furthermore, (DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2007; Roberts and Pruitt, 2009 and Thorne, 2011) assert that education stands to benefit when educators, whether in schools or colleges, synergize with their peers and take decisions based on a wealth of professional experience, information and knowledge. Collaboration can enhance teachers' confidence because they learn from and with each other. The examples and diversity of their colleagues and peers, which characterizes Actor Network Theory (Whittle and Spicer, 2008) could also help them develop a powerful sense of efficacy.

Working in a communication vacuum without the input, support and stimulus or ideas of other professionals is not conducive to collaboration and to the professional development of school practitioners. Esera (2002, p.187) claims that classroom isolation 'fails to contribute positively to professional development.' While DuFour and Eaker (1998, p.27) contend that 'building a school's capacity to learn is a **collaborative** rather than an **individual** task', Carter (1997) notes that the culture of working in isolation can in fact be a barrier to fostering collaboration and collegiality. Slater (2006, p.219) argues that 'Players cannot act in isolation. Isolation reinforces and perpetuates traditional beliefs and behaviour.' Roberts and Pruitt (2009, p.18) made a significant observation in this regard when they stated that:

Our experiences as facilitators of school-change projects bear out that the dialogue that occurs when isolation is reduced is perceived by teachers as an exchange of valuable information with peers.

## 7. Tensions and challenges when establishing intra- and inter-school collaboration

Worldwide educational reform demonstrates a shift from the conventional practice of teachers working in isolation in their classrooms to a culture of synergy and collegiality. However, creating a paradigm shift and getting everyone on board is not tension free and demands caution. To begin with, when exploring collaboration and its impact one naturally needs to appreciate the context in which this is taking place, since as Chapman *et al*. (2010, p.55) argue:

It would seem that the sum of individuals' perspectives within an organisation may influence the overall organisational attitude or readiness for networking, partnership, and collaborative partnership working.

Hence, one has to understand and appreciate that promoting a collaborative mind-set, whilst crucial, will bring with it difficulties and can create conflict (Collinson *et al.*, 2006). DuFour and Eaker (1998, p.118) seem to corroborate the perception that establishing a collaborative mentality is challenging, particularly when they claim that:

...the isolation of teachers is so ingrained in the traditional culture of schools that invitations to collaborate are insufficient. To build professional learning communities, meaningful collaboration must be systematically embedded into the daily life of the school.

Perhaps understandably, embarking on a journey of change can be a rather complex issue, particularly if it compromises the stakeholders' position and ideologies. Justifiably, moving from an isolationist culture to one of synergy and collegiality becomes a challenge, particularly for adults. Research (Datnow *et al.*, 2002; Fullan, 2007 and Hall, 1999) corroborates the complex impact of change when it shows that adopting a collaborative practice, whether with other professional practitioners or the external community, may mean shifting from a prescriptive model to a more participatory model. This would imply that people have to change their ways (NCSL, 2006).

In addition, the literature (Collinson *et al.*, 2006; Mendels and Mitgang, 2013) not only contends that this transformation is a challenge but that it necessitates time and ongoing reinforcement. As Collinson *et al.* (2006) argue people grow into this philosophy of working with others and being members of teams in different ways. Slater (2006, p.219) highlights the notion of gradualism when she argues that 'when we seek collaboration for change, we must recognize that it is a gradual process.' Gradualism is not just an issue for the individual teacher, but also for leaders and managers of colleges and schools who are responsible for effective collaborative practices. Fullan (2007, p.285) makes a key observation highlighting the point that collaborative policies need sound planning, not only because stakeholders have to adapt to working with others but also because 'Collaboration is powerful, which means that people can do powerfully wrong things together.' Fullan (2007, p.185), also argues that collaboration '... makes a positive difference only when it is focused on student performance for all and on the associated innovative practice.'

The literature on collaboration tends to provide a dichotomous playing field. Some research shows that '... 'learning schools' do better than those lingering with the isolationist traditions of teaching' (Fullan, 1995 citing Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). DuFour and Mattos (2013, p.37) contend that 'the most powerful strategy for improving both teaching and learning...is...by creating the collaborative culture...' Additionally, Ainscow and Howes (2007, p.292) claim that the findings of their research show that collaboration '...has an enormous potential for fostering system-wide improvement.' However, as already noted, we have to be careful of the tensions that can arise in a context of collaboration, when exploring areas such as distributed leadership and networking.

### *8. Collaboration between schools and the wider community*

Bringing the community and other schools into play and sustaining a joint-working mentality among the schools and with the external context, calls for a paradigm shift in value systems, in the beliefs, norms, attitudes and skills of all stakeholders. Datnow *et al.* (2002, p.31) recognise that the external community affects educators' stance to reforms and the how schools work:

Educators' perspectives and responses to reform can be deeply embedded within a larger societal context. ...Events outside schools profoundly affect what happens inside them.

Furthermore, Stoll and Fink (2003) argue that schools are not isolated institutions and cannot disregard the fact that they exist within a social context that incorporates other schools and the social environment around the school. They claim that if schools ignore the social environment in which they function, both with other schools and the external context around them they would be irreversibly contributing 'to the incoherence of pupils' lives' (p.133). Cooperation and communication with the external community is considered by many (Bezzina, 2006; DuFour, 2004 and Stoll and Fink, 2003) as fundamental in the educational journey of the children they 'share'.

Middlewood (1999) maintains that school communities need to acknowledge the cultural and social context within which this collaborative endeavour is to exist and work; otherwise as Bryk and Schneider (2002) concede, building a culture of partnership, collaboration and mutual trust between schools and the outside community will not be as straightforward as one may hope for. Consequently Hadfield and Chapman (2009) go a step further when they recognise the building of partnership between the school and the external context as a leadership challenge. They (2009, p.105) argue that

the key leadership challenge at a whole network level is to influence the external context in ways that shape it to become more conducive to networking.

In addition Hadfield and Chapman (2009) claim that building collaboration between the school and the external community becomes a challenge for school leaders particularly when they have to maintain 'the connection between the individual agenda of schools and the overarching purpose and aim of the network.' (p.105)

Networking and collaborating with the community is not only perceived as a leadership challenge but can also become slightly problematic, particularly since both camps live in two different worlds and have a history of considering each other with distrust and antagonism (Waller, 1932 cited in Hargreaves, 2000). One barrier to communication that can have a negative impact on establishing cooperation with the external community may be the result of the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity between the two groups. Overcoming the tensions that such an issue can generate is addressed by Graham-Clay (2005, pp.124-125) when she maintains that:

The time and effort invested by teachers to research and better understand the cultures reflected in their school community can only serve to enhance partnership opportunities.

James *et al.* (2011b) acknowledge that school governing bodies play a significant role in the success of the school and can sustain communication and cooperation between the school and the external communities. They (2011b, p.429) also recognize that: ‘...the work of school governing bodies is complicated and onerous and that governing bodies face a number of pressures.’ In addition, the Boards of Governors can themselves create tension by imposing their agenda rather than helping schools in developing their own. Literature (Huber, 2011; James *et al.*, 2011b and Ranson, 2011) recognizes the presence of tension around school governance because it is impacted by socio-political and socio-economic pressures. Furthermore, James, Brammer and Fertig (2011a, p.394) in their editorial maintain that:

(t)he conceptualization of school governance...calls for an analytic framework for understanding: the ‘location’ of actors in the network; and what guides and forms their actions and their modes of working.

Although establishing such a partnership can be permeated by challenges for school leaders and can be riddled with tension, the truth of the matter is that many (parents and governors) commend those Heads of School who establish and sustain a partnership between schools and the outside community, particularly parents (Day *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, school-to-school cooperation coupled with effective leadership, particularly for schools facing challenging circumstances, can work and foster improvement as long as the support for these types of networks addresses their needs (Chapman, 2008).

### **3.3 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Leadership and Management**

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

The primary research question addresses the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. One of the subsidiary questions of the study central to educational leadership and management explores the probable implications for educational leadership and management in the context of such collaboration. The intention of this section is to engage with the literature central to the subsidiary theme of educational leadership and management that shall serve as basis for the understanding of the implications that the above mentioned form of collaboration may possibly create. Morrison *et al.*’s (2007) claim, that the significance of educational leadership and management has created much debate. Furthermore, as noted by Norton (2005), the framework of school leadership has changed, particularly because school systems have become more complex in the current information age. Section (3.2) embodies the following sub-sections:

- 3.3.1 presents the introduction that highlights the varied and interesting discussion the theme of educational leadership and management has generated among researchers, and that its context has changed because of the complexity of school systems;
- 3.3.2 highlights definitions around educational leadership and management;
- 3.3.3 explores the interplay between Leadership and Management – A contentious issue;
- 3.3.4 examines the educational leadership and management rationale, where the relevance of influence and vision to educational leadership, together with educational management in a centralized system, and the personal and interactive dimensions of educational leadership are explored;

- 3.3.5 presents an examination of educational leadership and the school, together the professional development of school leaders;
- 3.3.6 explores the moral dimension of educational leadership;
- 3.3.7 presents an exposition on the notion of authority vis-à-vis educational leadership and management;
- 3.3.8 examines the collaborative, collegial and distributed leadership models;
- 3.3.9 presents certain leadership challenges.

### **3.3.2 Defining Educational Leadership and Management**

#### *1. Educational leadership*

Bush (2008, p.1) argues that educational leadership and management are deemed to be ‘fields of study and practice concerned with the operation of schools and other educational organisations.’ Furthermore, both are considered crucial to the growing challenges and demands that schools have to grapple with. Bolman and Deal (1997, p.xiii-xiv) argue:

Leading and managing are distinct, but both are important. ...The challenge of modern organisations requires the objective perspective of the manager as well as the flashes of vision and commitment wise leadership provides.

Leadership has become a common word in modern parlance. Politicians use it in their speeches, policy makers emphasise its importance in various policy documents and courses are offered to those who aspire to, or are in, leadership positions. Bennett *et al.* (2006), maintain that the term leadership has not only acquired a variegated definition but this variety of definitions has impacted the understanding of what is deemed to be effective leadership and what training current and prospective leaders should receive. Bennett *et al.* (2006, p.ix) claim that:

Historically, it has been defined in different ways, and the implications of each definition have created quite different perceptions of what counts as ‘good’ leadership and what should be involved in leadership preparation.

All this prompts us to reflect on:

- whether the term is being used loosely;
- whether it is merely a buzzword that will lose its lustre in the years to come;
- whether the concept of leadership has come of age.

Literature (Bennett *et al.*, 2006 and Bottery, 2004) claims that the meaning of leadership has led to such diverse opinion that it can be considered a rather subjective term hinging on one’s perspective. Yukl (2002, as cited in Bush, 2011) corroborates this view when he claims that ‘the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective’ (pp.4-5).

Although research highlights different definitions around leadership, Day, (2005, p.167) claims that '(l)eadership is essentially the process of building and maintaining a sense of vision, culture and interpersonal relationships...'

## *2. The concept of educational management*

An early interpretation (Cuban, 1988 cited by Bush, 2008, p.4) suggested that 'management is seen as a maintenance activity' because 'managing is maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements.' Bush (2008, p.4) adds that 'management relates to implementation or technical issues.' Considering that management is related to the running of an organization, one tends to agree with Day, (2005, p.167) when he states that 'management is the coordination, support and monitoring of organisational activities.'

When considering the concept of educational management one has to respect the context one is exploring or working in, particularly when Bush (2011, p.2) maintains that '(m)anagement is directed at the achievement of certain educational objectives.' Any definition can depend on the type of system one is working in and can determine how positions are defined and practised. Definitions of educational management abound, as evidenced in literature. Bush (2008, p.1), who cites the definitions of educational management by Bolam (1999) and Sapre (2002), considers educational management as 'a field of study and practice concerned with the operation of educational organizations.' He (2008, p.4) adds that 'educational institutions operate within a legislative framework set down by national, provincial or state parliaments.' Educational management thus focuses on organizational objectives and the implementation of educational policy.

### ***3.3.3 The Interplay between Leadership and Management – A Contentious Issue***

Effective educational leadership and management have been considered by many as crucial to the growing challenges and demands that schools have constantly had to grapple with. The issue of whether or not leadership can be differentiated from management has led to intense debate. Bush and Glover (2003) considered these two concepts to be linked and contended. They (2003, p.12) claimed that 'managerial leadership ... is an essential component of successful leadership.' Other studies (e.g. Bolman and Deal, 1997; Cuban 1988 and Hallinger, 2003) show that an effective and efficient school leader needs to demonstrate both leadership and management skills, and that leadership acumen forms part of the school management turf, even though they may be distinct areas.

Crawford (2002) shows that school leaders need to take into account the issue of management, as she contends that the relationship between leadership and management in an educational environment is stronger than one may think. In her arguments (2002, p.63) she suggests:

...leaders need to attend more closely to those things that are to do with management if they are to have the capacity to be more creative and effective leaders within a variety of contexts and a changing educational environment.

Crawford (2002, p.64) also makes a case for distinguishing between them when she adds that although 'educational management and effective leadership are symbiotic, they should be differentiated.' Crawford's dual position reinforces the view that the relationship between these two concepts remains a highly contentious issue. Bennett *et al.* (2006, p.xi), contend that in real life situations leadership and management 'are closely linked', whereas other literature distinguishes between these two concepts. Bush (2008) refers to the literature (e.g. Bolam, 1999; Cuban, 1988 and Day *et al.*, 2001)

that differentiates between leadership and management. The distinction between these two concepts and their implications to the educational landscape is also considered in Sergiovanni's (2005) reference to James Lipham (1964). Sergiovanni (2005, p.44) claims that Lipham:

...was one of the early writers in educational administration to make the distinction between management and leadership by claiming that leadership was about changing things while management was about running things as they are.

All this can imply that the question of distinction between leadership and management has become a contentious issue because the demarcation line is rather nebulous. And, if there is no divide, can we say that they overlap? And if they do overlap, as Bush (2008) concedes, can we determine where they link up? Whatever the answers may be, the discussion remains on-going. Furthermore, whether they are differentiated or not; what is certain is that, Heads of School are expected to lead and manage their learning community effectively to enhance the professional acumen of the staff and achieve overall educational goals. Bush (2008, p.4) argues strongly for the equal standing of these two disciplines if schools are to be effective and register success: 'Leadership and management need to be given equal prominence if schools and colleges are to operate effectively and achieve their objectives.' Crawford (2002) seems to share this opinion when she compares the present day understanding of leadership and management in education as two integrated disciplines to how they were regarded in the 1980's, when studies may have considered leadership to be simply a facet of management. She (2002, p.63) states that:

Whereas in the 1980's leadership might have been seen as an aspect of management, it now appears that without leadership there is no management in education.

Bennett *et al.* (2006, p.ix) argue that whether there is a distinction or whether they are associated depends on the 'understandings or theories of leadership.' I am inclined to agree with the notion of differentiation between the two disciplines. A good leader is not necessarily an efficient manager, particularly when it is acknowledged that school management requires different skills. Bush and Middlewood (2006, p.viii) note, that since education is expected to enhance the human potential, it 'provides a unique management challenge.' Experience has shown that it is possible for a Head to be a good manager but a disappointing leader and vice-versa. A number of researchers set the two roles apart because:

- they may see them as two disciplines directed at distinct educational objectives;
- occasionally there is the case where both are not realized professionally.

It is a fact that practically in large and small states, when individuals are handed a Headship post they also assume a managerial position because it seems to come with the territory. Consequently, Bush's (2008, p.ix) claim that there is 'an understanding that school principals and senior staff need to be good leaders as well as effective managers', particularly 'if schools and colleges are to achieve the wide-ranging objectives set for them by their many stakeholders...' (Bush, 2008, p.18) can ring true.



### ***3.3.4 The Educational Leadership and Management Rationale***

Given the importance that society attributes to education and the responsibility that society has bestowed on educational leaders and educators, it is crucial that the concept of educational leadership needs to be examined and understood well. Broadly speaking, individuals that are considered to be exerting some form of influence can be regarded as leaders, suggesting that 'leadership is independent of positional authority' (Bush, 2011, p.6). In the current context of on-going worldwide developing educational practices, the multifaceted aspects of leadership need to be analysed and understood if leadership is to reach its full potential.

The focus on school leadership has increased, and its importance in fostering school and system wide improvement (Harris, 2006) coupled with student achievement, has been acknowledged time and again. Furthermore, educational policies and practices have for long projected the notion of a leader as one who can elicit conformity from others. But leadership can be more far reaching. According to Bezzina (2003, p.3):

...it is clear that leadership is interpersonal influence directed towards attaining goals which has a wide consensus as possible. The focus is therefore on the leader having the ability to influence over and above the mechanical compliance with direction and order. Today's leader, as that of tomorrow, has to display enthusiasm, passion and inspiration to get others to high levels of performance.

Fullan (2006) has consistently maintained that the quality of school leadership has a bearing on teacher motivation, and consequently on the teaching and learning context. Research and practice (Harris, 2003 and Sergiovanni, 2001) have shown that leadership is pivotal for securing long-term school improvement. Not only that, but appointed leaders need to understand what it is that they should lead and how best to accomplish it. Whilst needing to recognize that 'the what' and 'the how' constantly interact and reshape each other, leaders need to question 'the why' of things if they are going to ensure that their decisions have an ethical impact (Sergiovanni, 2006).

#### ***1. The relevance of influence and vision to educational leadership***

Bush (2011), notes that central to the diverse aspects of leadership is the dual notions of 'influence' and 'vision'. Bush (2008, p.3) seems to consider 'vision' more essential than 'influence' when he argues that the notion of 'influence' 'is neutral in that it does not explain or recommend what goals or actions should be sought through this process.' On the other hand, 'influence' (Bezzina, 2003, p.3) also implies working with and through others. Hence we may say that it is people oriented. According to Bush (2011, p.108) 'influence represents an ability to affect outcomes and depends on personal characteristics and expertise.' Bush (2011) goes on to distinguish between influence and authority. Bush (2011, p.6) contends that while influence 'could be exercised by anyone in a school', authority is located in 'formal positions, such as the principal or the headteacher.'

Further consideration of the literature (Bush, 2011; Dempster and Logan, 1998 and Southworth, 1993) on this issue of 'vision' and 'influence' seems to point to the understanding that in educational leadership 'vision' is more significant than 'influence'. According to Bush (2008: 3), 'vision is increasingly regarded as an essential component of effective leadership'. He stresses the significance of 'vision' over 'influence' when he refers to the generalisations about leadership as established by Beare *et al.* (1992), two of which show the centrality of vision to positive leadership:

- outstanding leaders have a vision for their organisations;
- attention should be given to institutionalising vision if leadership is to be successful. (Bush, 2008, p3).

‘Vision’ articulates where its leaders want to take their followers and educational institution. Since ‘mission’ represents what the institution stands for, therefore one can consider the leader’s vision built round the school’s ‘mission’. It takes in hand the way the implementation of policies is addressed and accordingly implies direction. A leader begins by setting a vision, and does this by listening, understanding, motivating and incorporating ideas, and talents and energies of others into this vision. Hence, ‘vision’ can be said to determine where the leader of a school wants to go and where s/he wants the school that they lead to reach. It is therefore crucial to have, what Bienzle and Jütte (2008, p.11) call a ‘visionary leader’, one who presents a vision grounded in relationships and intellectual tasks that honour and challenge every member of the community to develop talents that serve both individual and collective purposes. Davies and Davies (2006, p.123) argue that:

Strategic leaders are concerned with not just managing the now but setting up a framework of where the organisation needs to be in the future, setting a direction for the organisation.

Here one asks: Can developing a ‘vision’ be problem free or will it be challenging, and why? Literature (Bolam *et al.*, 1993; Foreman, 1998 and Fullan, 1992a and 1992b) contends that developing a ‘vision’ may become problematic and at times challenging. Consequently, it is difficult to sustain (Fullan, 1992a) particularly given the centrality of government policies and projections (Bush, 2008) in a landscape where education is a central theme on many a government’s agenda because of its considered significance to the social, economic and cultural development of a country.

## *2. Educational management in a centralized system*

Educational management in a centralized system has attracted the attention of researchers (Baldacchino and Farrugia, 2002; Bush, 2008; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009 and Sergiovanni, 2005). Lazaridou and Iordanides (2011, p.7) draw attention to the highly centralized education system of Greece where ‘in both primary and secondary sectors, few responsibilities are devolved to managers and leaders at the local or school level.’ Hence, in government controlled systems, educational management can be associated with educational policies and aims incorporated in the government’s political programme for education (Bush, 2008). In such a politically controlled landscape, national standards are set by the central government and schools are expected to operate in line with these. Bush (2008) seems to harbour certain reservations about centralisation policy that seems to be a facet of large and small states education systems, (e.g. Lazaridou and Iordanides, 2011 and Thorne, 2011) because school leaders have to operate within set parameters. Lazaridou and Iordanides (2011, p.7) maintain that in such a scenario the leader’s good judgement ‘is severely constrained’ and consequently even the administration of a school. Such central control could very well be criticised because it seems to leave school leaders with little or no manoeuvring space and power in which to establish aims and plan the way forward for their schools based on the specific needs of the students.

Bush (2008, p.53) argues that when the selection process and promotion of school leaders is in the hands of the Central Authorities, it is a ‘strategy typically used by centralised systems’ and refers to it as ‘a planned approach’ (2008, p.53). Bush (2008, p.54) argues both for and against a centralised system when he writes that ‘this approach may be criticised on grounds of equal opportunity’ and on the upside he adds that such a process ‘reduces the ‘chance’ element and provides the potential for

smooth leadership succession' (p.54). When discussing the aspect of educational management and the appointing of school leaders, Bush (2008, p.62) also explores it from a macro perspective – at systems level. He mentions a number of countries (particularly Cyprus, France, Malta and Singapore), where 'the degree of centralisation varies but decisions are made within national or local government, rather than by school-level bodies.' The reference that Bush makes to the above mentioned countries can imply that such a central political strategy does not distinguish between large and small states. However, Baldacchino (2002) claims that the issue of educational planning and management in small states places them 'in a league of their own' because their situation is 'usually complemented by insularity' (p.7).

Bush (2008) also takes to task those school leaders who are likely to give more importance to government policies and ignore the development of a school vision. He (2008, p.2) argues that 'if managers simply focus on implementing external initiatives, they risk becoming *managerialist*.' Whilst he acknowledges the importance of carrying out managerial tasks for the organisation to function, it is important for the school not to lose sight of its vision and goals. It is here that leadership can become a critical component. For as Bush (1999a) notes when leaders of schools tend to ignore educational values and give more importance to bureaucratic procedures, the outcome can lead to what he terms as 'managerialism'.

Considering the converse of centralisation, Bush (2008, p.54) looks at strategies used by decentralised systems and argues that in such systems 'it is not possible to adopt a planned approach' because the selection process of school leaders and the management of schools is handed over to schools. He adds that countries like Denmark, England, New Zealand and Portugal have in place more decentralized structures and procedures for the selection of school leaders and the management of schools. However, Bush (2008, p.53) legitimately claims that such a strategy is characterised by a central weakness in that 'insufficient well-qualified candidates may submit themselves for scrutiny.' One may have the inclination to agree with the above, particularly when the number of applications for the posts does not meet the demand. This in itself may cause a dilemma, which certain countries (such as England), is addressing by 'creating an appropriate leadership succession climate' (Bush, 2008, p.54).

### *3. The personal dimensions of educational leadership*

Considering the issue of subjectivity in its widest sense, one can refer to that literature, which considers educational leadership as akin to individualism and to personal behaviour. Bennett *et al.* (2006, p.x) argues that:

...leadership as exercised by leaders locates the activity in individuals rather than in any social setting. ... Leadership is therefore seen as a fluid concept: an organisational characteristic or quality, which rests as much upon particular individual expertise as it does on a person's formal position or status within the organisation.

Bottery (2004, p.19) corroborates this observation when he summarizes Harris's (2003) claim that literature on educational leadership has focused on the individual, rather than the individual within an organization, particularly when he argues that:

...most leadership studies in education having been dominated by the studies of individual headteachers and principals, which only further instantiates individualistic views of leadership.

Sergiovanni's (2006, p.2) assertion that 'leadership is a personal thing' underlines the notion that educational leadership is rather individualistic and personal. The inference is that leadership can be considered as a personality trait that grows and comes from within the person. Furthermore, Sergiovanni (2006) explores the theme of leadership from a metaphorical perspective when he discusses the concept of leadership in terms of the heart, head and hand. The 'heart' of leadership addresses what a person believes, values and is committed to. The 'head' embodies the theories of practice that individuals have developed over time and their ability to evaluate their daily experiences in light of these theories. The 'hand' of leadership represents the actions taken, the decisions made, the leadership and management behaviours that individuals use as their strategies are established in the form of school programmes, policies and procedures.

#### *4. The interactive dimension of educational leadership*

The literature (e.g. Lumby and Coleman, 2007; Rubin, 2009 and Yukl, 2002) also presents leadership as an interactive activity one that involves others and is determined by the collective rather than the individual. Rubin (2009, p.xiii) observes that leadership is an 'interactive behaviour.' What's more, a focal element in many definitions of leadership is that it involves a process of influence upon others. Yukl (2002, p.3) argues that:

Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or groups) to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation.

The notion of influence is highlighted also by Bezzina (2006) and Leithwood (2001). Yukl's (2002) argument can also imply that leadership necessitates interaction with others, generally identified as followers. Furthermore, Lumby and Coleman (2007) while maintaining that leadership is synonymous with influencing others, they also highlight the role that educators in general can play as leaders. They (2007, pp.2-3) state that leadership is

...the conduct of emotions, thoughts, and actions which are designed to influence others in a chosen direction. ...All educators are potentially leaders, in that all may create followers by influencing those around them...

Rubin's (2009) observation and its implication of interactivity leads us to reflect on whether educational leaders need to be equipped with effective abilities if their interaction with others is to bear fruition; particularly when taking into account Bennett *et al.*'s (2006) statement that effective leadership is crucial to success. The inference is that effective leadership can lead to the development of powerful, motivational and inspirational strategies, defined by organisational characteristics and structures.

Ample evidence from studies, (Bennett *et al.*, 2006 and Chapman *et al.*, 2010) show that school leaders need to have appropriate capabilities and skills if they are to shape school effectiveness and improvement, particularly those facing difficulties (Chapman, 2008). Furthermore, Rosenholtz (1989) claims that outstanding school leaders are fundamental to establishing and sustaining

successful schools and that student achievement is an exceptional yardstick in illustrating effective school leaders. Similarly, school leaders also have an impact on the overall development of children, hence the affective domain (Jacobson and Bezzina, 2008).

Within such a context one appreciates that leadership is both a personal and collective endeavour. Leaders need to have the necessary competencies so as to be able to give their contribution to the overall achievement of the organisation, particularly when one considers that leadership is about attitude towards self and others.

### ***3.3.5 Educational Leadership and the School***

Coping with educational reforms, changes and challenges entails vision, as well as a transformation in culture, mind-set and practice by all school practitioners and their leaders (Fullan, 2007). The school has not only been recognised by many (e.g. Fullan, 2007; Roberts and Pruitt, 2009 and Sergiovanni, 2006) as a teaching and learning community, in which educational reform is implemented and takes a definite form, but also as a professional community embodying a competent and structured system that has a shared vision. It is also held that the school's collective concept articulates a coherent picture of what the school will look like when its core beliefs are applied (e.g. Stoll and Fink, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2005 and Bennett *et al.*, 2006). Research (Datnow *et al.*, 2002 and DuFour and Eaker, 1998) also shows that a school gathers and assimilates information on student achievement, explores research and best practices to identify possible strategies that enhance teacher practice and sustain its vision.

Bush and Middlewood (2006, p.viii) maintain that: 'Schools, colleges and universities have the demanding and vital role of developing the potential of children and young people.' Given the important role of the school and the responsibilities that society has bequeathed to it, how crucial is the position of a school leader? Having a leader in place is a major requirement for a school to go forward, but quality leadership is pivotal for schools (Bush, 2008; Harris, 2006 and Rosenholtz, 1989) to improve and grow from strength to strength, particularly in times of change and reform. Bush and Jackson (2002, cited in Bush and Glover 2004, p.6) argue that: 'High-quality leadership is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important requirements for successful schools.'

Good leaders need to have vision, a willingness to embrace reform to be innovative and talented (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008). An effective leader not only performs excellently but empowers others to achieve excellence. Fullan (2007) delves deeper in the 'why' of a quality school leader. He (2007, p77) observes that:

'...strong leadership internal to the school or the district is a crucial variable. Without quality internal leadership, you end up not with limited innovation, but rather its opposite – too many fragmented, uncoordinated, flavor-of-the-month changes...'

A school that is led and managed by an effective and zealous leader can possess the necessary qualities that help it emerge as a professional learning community, ready to encompass collective accountability in its endeavour to realize its shared vision for the students. According to Bennett *et al.* (2006, p.32), 'leaders become great by unleashing the potential and abilities of followers.' Naturally, this implies that the followers are supportive of the change process or developments taking place and that the atmosphere is conducive rather than contrived (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998).

However, one needs to appreciate that the environment in which educational leaders work can be difficult and challenging. Sergiovanni (2005, p.100) claims: 'Leaders work with multiple goals and with ill-defined, ever-changing contexts. ... Leaders struggle to understand contexts, make decisions, and pursue solutions...' Hence, becoming an efficient and effective leader requires nurturing a particular form of maturity that will help the person grow from within to handle the leadership challenges.

An efficient and effective leader grows into the role with experience and training, with the support of a mentor and 'critical friend.' Literature (Bush, 2008; and Moorosi and Bush, 2011) acknowledges that since schools are continually facing new challenges their leaders need to be well trained. Moorosi and Bush (2011, p.63) contend that

Schools are faced with growing demands due to forces of globalisation and growing accountabilities. These demands require highly skilled and well-prepared leadership.

### *1. Professional development of school leaders*

The growing demand to have well-trained school leaders is underlined by Moorosi and Bush, (2011). Citing Bush and Jackson (2002, p.418) they maintain that: 'It is unsurprising, then, that leadership preparation and development are on the agenda across the world.' Moorosi and Bush (2011) acknowledge how the world has come to recognise the efficacy of school leadership training. They also reinforce the issue that if society is to have efficient and capable school leaders, these need to be professionally and academically prepared. According to Bush (2008) it is imperative to have highly trained and skilled school leaders to avoid jeopardising the children's future. Bush (2008, p.xi) strongly believes that having Heads of School who have not been properly trained 'is a gamble and we should not gamble with children's education.'

Such explicit leadership training awareness, particularly at a time when global development is gathering pace, has led a number of countries to put formal leadership preparation programmes and new qualification requirements in place. Bush (2008) refers to a number of countries across the world that are running courses for prospective headship candidates to give them the proper leadership training to enable them to cope with their responsibilities as Heads of educational institutions. Bush (2008) mentions the Principals' Qualification Programme (PQP) in Ontario, Canada; the programme and meticulous process that France has designed for its prospective secondary school leaders; the diploma in educational administration and management run by the University of Malta; the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) run in England and the ACE: School Leadership programme that became compulsory in South Africa in 2010, among others. Such programmes and the requirement of suitable qualifications are envisaged to prepare individuals aspiring for a school headship post, to develop and reinforce a variety of leadership and managerial skills in their approach to their work. Such training, which has a cascading beneficial effect on the whole school, right down to the learner is highlighted in many studies (e.g. Bennett *et al.*, 2006; Bush, 2008; Moorosi and Bush, 2011; Rubin, 2009; Senge, 2006; and Sergiovanni, 2005). Different countries acknowledge that school leaders require the appropriate qualifications and formal training in school leadership so that schools will be able to meet the growing demands that a dynamic society places on them. According to Shields (2004, p.109 cited in Crawford 2009, p.5) 'Educational leadership is widely recognised as complex and challenging.' The day to day running of a school or college presents challenges and difficulties for school leaders, which can best be tackled through training, courage, determination, vision and a moral stance.

### **3.3.6 The Moral Dimension of Educational Leadership**

Literature (Grace, 2000 and Sergiovanni, 1991) recognizes the significance of the moral dimension to educational leadership. Furthermore, Sergiovanni, (2005, p.14) acknowledges that: 'Leadership combines management know-how with values and ethics.' He (2005, p.61) also perceives schools as 'communities of responsibility' and gives an elaborative explanation of the community 'as a moral phenomenon' (2005, p.61) with moral obligations:

Community is viewed as a moral phenomenon rather than simply a geographic or territorial entity. ... Not only do members of the community share a common focus, they also feel morally obliged to embody this focus in their behaviour.

Even Bush (2011, p.186) comments on the importance of moral leadership and its link to organisational leadership:

Moral leadership is consistent with organizational culture in that it is based on the values, belief and attitudes of principals and other educational leaders. It focuses on the moral purpose of education and on the behaviours to be expected of leaders operating within the moral domain.

Bush (2011, p.186 citing Greenfield, 1991) contends 'that managerial leadership must have a moral base.' Greenfield (1991) stresses the correlation between the moral and managerial dimensions of leadership. The importance of the moral aspect is also noted by Leithwood *et al.* (1999), who add another dimension to the issue. They suggest an association between the moral aspect and authority and influence; two concepts which Bush (2011) elaborates on when he discusses '*authority*' and '*influence*' in the context of 'sources of power in education' (p.108).

### **3.3.7 Educational Leadership and Management - The Notion of Authority**

Bush (2011) observes that authority is associated with educational leadership and management. He (2011, p.108) argues that leaders of schools or colleges 'have substantial authority by virtue of their formal leadership positions.' However, in his discourse on power in education Bush (2011) draws a distinction between 'authority' and 'influence'. For him 'influence' denotes a competence that shapes results and is affected by personality and expertise. He adds that '(i)nfluence is the key dimension of leadership' (2011, p.109) and also considers leaders of schools as having official authority to execute their beliefs. However, one asks: Is influence or authority alone enough? Studies show that through a combination of the post school leaders hold (i.e. one of authority, coupled with influence) can make a difference. So a leader may need to exhibit both.

Bush (2011, p.108) considers 'authority' as the 'legitimate power' that leaders assume when they take up their post. He goes on to regard this as a form of 'positional power' (2011, p.109) that gives school leaders the right to compel members of staff to implement their policies and decisions. Although Bush (2011, p.109) adds that:

In schools, the head is regarded as the legitimate leader and possesses legal authority which is inevitably a key determinant of school policy

He also concedes to the fact that this form of power does not mean that Heads of School have absolute power because the expertise of other members of staff gives them certain authority and power within their own right. Hence the positional power of the Head of School is in a way counterbalanced.

According to Sergiovanni (2001), the post of a Head of School gives the individual the authority to take decisions. He (2001, p.28) maintains that the leadership of a Head of School is based on one of two forms of authority: 'bureaucratic or personal authority.' Additionally, Sergiovanni (2001, pp.28-29) distinguishes between these two forms of authority when arguing that

...personal authority is in the form of the head's charisma, motivational abilities, and human relations skills. Bureaucratic authority exists in the form of mandates, rule, regulations, policies, job descriptions, and expectations that leaders and others communicate.

Sergiovanni (2001) elaborates on the theme of authority by noting the basis on which teachers should work with and support the Head of School. He claims that teachers support and follow an effective school leader and not because of one's personality and communication skills. For Sergiovanni (2001 p.29) this is 'a poor reason.' According to Sergiovanni (2001) collaboration is fostered and sustained when teachers support the leader of the school because of their sense of shared values and purpose; they feel a sense of moral obligation. He (2001, p.29) refers to this sense of obligation as a form of 'moral authority'. Shared values, which reinforce the vision of the school, cultivate a collegial framework, which Sergiovanni (2001, p.41) links with leadership vision when he claims that:

...visions...need to be discovered or forged as a 'consequence' of everyone learning, problem solving, striving to reach a higher moral level or operation, and finding sense and meaning in the bargain.

(Caruana, 2010) expounds on the association between educational leadership and vision and claims that an effective leader begins by establishing a vision and works to increase the efficiency of the group by listening, taking on board suggestions and making full use of the groups' skills and energies to formulate and actualize that vision. An effective leader can lead the group from the known into the unknown. Such an observation finds support in Houston's (2007) discourse when he draws comparisons between the metaphor of bridges and the role of educational leadership. He refers to bridges as structures that take us from what is established into the unfamiliar. (Houston, 2007, p.2) notes that educational leaders use their authority 'to build a bridge and lead people across it, because it is only by crossing that bridge that people can find a new place to stand.' Furthermore, leadership is not only about leading and implementing policies with authority; it is also about being inclusive. Literature (Gronn and Hamilton, 2004; Spillane *et al.*, 2007) shows that collaborative and distributed leadership is powerful particularly because it can be disseminated among the members of the school community and its members. Sergiovanni (2007) notes that all members will feel empowered when they are ready to embrace and share the values of the community.

This model of leadership, however, presents two main limits. It appears too normative and idealistic. Sergiovanni (2007) seems to imply that all members of a school desire and want to work with each other; assumes that everyone is willing to give and make sacrifices for the common good. Such collaborative model underestimates the conflicts and the difficulties existing when chasing unanimous agreement, it fails to recognise 'the micro-political battles of everyday staffroom



manoeuvring' (Day *et al.*, 2008, p.81). It does not address the responsibility of the Head towards other stakeholders because collegiality makes it impossible to identify one single person as the referent of shared management processes (Vidoni *et al.*, 2008).

Consequently, it is through systems thinking and collegial conversation that administrators and teachers begin the process of critically analysing assumptions that perpetuate the status quo, recognising previously unseen complexities and conflicts within the school, welcoming problems as challenges, and perceiving the gaps between what is and what can be. For the school to have purpose, members of the school community must identify their core beliefs and develop a shared vision.

### **3.3.8 Collaborative, Collegial and Distributed Leadership Models**

#### *1. Educational leadership: the collaborative and collegial models*

Sergiovanni (2006) maintains that school collaborative cultures are said to have the potential to stimulate teamwork, to create the right environment where the players can work together in a collegial atmosphere and are the moral fibre of school communities which 'bring leadership and learning together' (p.120). According to Barth (1990) collegiality is the most important factor in determining the success of a school because creativity and passion will thrive when a school is alive with collegiality. Collegiality can help teachers become actively engaged in improvement activities. Bush (2011, p.72) argues:

Collegial models include all those theories which emphasize that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organization.

Sergiovanni (2006) also delves into the issue of commitment and its significance in learning communities. Team leaders and the players need to be committed to building a collegial mind-set and sustaining a collaborative culture. Uncommitted leaders and actors are barrier to collaboration. Sergiovanni (1990) also observes that mutual commitment and support empowers the leaders of schools and their members of staff, and consequently more is achieved collectively than through individual effort. Bezzina (2006, p.27) wrote:

Leadership is the act of identifying important goals and then motivating and enabling others to devote themselves and all necessary resources to achievement.

Hopkins (2005) and Bush and Glover (2004) maintain that '*High-quality leadership*' (Bush and Jackson, 2002 in Bush and Glover, 2004, p.6) helps collaboration to thrive and thus augments pupil learning. This view is supported by Osler (2000, p.vii) who argues: 'Where effective leadership is in place, the impact on pupils' learning is significant and demonstrable.'

The dedication of the leader of the college or school is the key to creating the propitious collegial environment by motivating and empowering synergy among the players, and appeasing tension and conflict (Fullan, 2001). Crawford's (2005) remark that in many countries leaders of schools are held responsible for the success or failure of the school, seems to substantiate the significant role of a Head in a school. Bezzina (2006, p.27) seems to acknowledge this and contends that: 'Leadership is the act of identifying important goals and then motivating and enabling others to devote themselves and all necessary resources to achievement.' Consequently, Heads of School will

be collaboratively developing and communicating a value-driven purpose for the future of the school community. According to Harris (2004, p.16) these Heads will be practising a distributed leadership style ‘through collaborative and joint working’. Bezzina and Cutajar (2010, p.6) elaborate on this issue of collaboration and collegiality when they observe that:

Leaders increase a group’s productivity by helping everyone in the group become more effective. Whatever the task or goal a leader helps everyone improve.

## *2. Educational leadership: The distributed leadership model*

The phenomenon of distributed leadership is another important leadership model that has been gaining currency in the twenty-first century (Bush, 2011). Academic literature (e.g. Bush, 2008 and 2011; Harris, 2004 and Southworth, 2002) suggests that such preference for distributed leadership can be due to the understanding that it is unlikely that one person can display leadership qualities in all situations (Morrison, 2002). Bush (2011, p.88) claims that distributed leadership seems to be replacing collegiality as the favoured approach. However, Harris (2004) notes that collegiality is central to distributed leadership because she argues that it is ‘characterized as a form of collective leadership’ (p.14) in which all members of the organisation can develop their expertise. She adds that ‘distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization’ (2004, p.13). Spender (2003, p.119) highlights distributed leadership when arguing that the NCSL’s programme to nurture distributed leadership

... signals a clear move away from the view of the headteacher as ‘leader’ towards a concept of leadership as an egalitarian and democratic collective responsibility...

Shared and distributed leadership provides space for dialogue and empowers others (Harris and Chapman, 2002). Active, efficient and sustained communication is considered essential. Research (Connolly and James, 2006; Gratton, 2000 and Kaplan and Norton, 2001) shows that creating an arena for dialogue, participation and collaboration is one of the qualities of good leadership. But: is collective decision taking always beneficial or can it, as Harris (2008) suggests, foster discord? This possibility is real and can be considered as healthy and productive, as long as difference is resolved through discussion. At the end it all depends on the kind of school leadership that is in place.

Davies and Davies (2006, p.125) contend that good leadership ‘...involves awakening the people in the school to alternative perspectives...’ and nurturing the right atmosphere shall empower others to participate and create enough incentive to dialogue so that change will be readily received (Davies, 2003). When people share in shaping the changes around them, they will be able to empower others to do the same and as contended by Burke (2010, p.52) ‘...distributed leadership can provide a quality leadership model for shared governance’.

### **3.3.9 The Leadership Challenges**

Global economic, political and social considerations, and ‘an increasingly sophisticated technologically driven knowledge society’ (Fullan, 2007, p.70) have provoked reforms in various sectors, including education. Schools are said to be intrinsic institutions of the society in which they exist and their practitioners had to ‘adapt to the changing clientele in schools’ (Stoll and Fink, 2003, p.6) and to ‘deal with the myriad of social problems society has dumped on schools’ (2003, p.6).

Datnow *et al.* (2002, p.18) observe that ‘societal expectations, especially concerning students’ academic achievement’ have intensified the pressure on schools and their systems to change.

Literature acknowledges that there is the need to move away from the individualistic and conventional teaching and learning model towards a more participatory one. Fullan’s (2007: 77) robust claim that ‘communities can instigate educational change’ supported by research case studies (Boyd, 1978; and Daft and Becker, 1978 in Fullan, 2007, p.77) is very revealing in the way external communities can influence educational change in one direction or another. The argument of Datnow *et al.* (2002, p.31) that ‘events outside schools profoundly affect what happens inside them’ emphasises the extent of external pressure on schools. Such societal pressure challenges educational systems to update their out-dated models.

The complex and diverse nature of educational challenges have increased the demand for new school systems and structures which are led by leaders who have the skills to facilitate change and take schools forward. Dean (2007, p.2) argues that the present-day realities illustrate that school leaders need to be better equipped because ‘normative hierarchical leadership strategies have grown increasingly ineffective for contemporary educational leadership.’ There are several quality studies across different countries that provide clear observations and arguments about the significance of school leaders as agents of change and whose leadership is indispensable for the success of educational reforms (Bennett *et al.*, 2006; Datnow *et al.*, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Muncey and Sergiovanni, 2005, 2006).

Research findings also demonstrate that educational leadership cannot just fall into place, particularly when we consider the increased demands on school leaders and administrators as a result of the on-going reforms in the educational sector. Reforms intensify educational accountability and standards (DiPaola, in Bennett *et al.*, 2006). In an era of constant change, and on-going large and small-scale reforms, school leaders need to update their leadership and management styles in their endeavour to keep the school focused on the overall goal (Sergiovanni, 2006).

Changing this prescriptive, educational system coupled with pedagogical transformations requires a number of noteworthy shifts, complemented with committed and innovative but humane leaders who also encompass incentives as part of their managerial strategy. Hoerr (2005, p.7) argues that

...good leaders change organisations; great leaders change people – nurturing and challenging them, helping them grow and develop, creating a culture in which they all learn – that an organisation can flourish.

Sergiovanni (2005, p.8) appears to make a case for leaders as the driving force in organisations when stating that ‘without incentives, it is believed, people will not be willing to change or otherwise participate as required.’ He can appear to suggest that sometimes leaders have to wield a certain degree of influence when motivating their members of staff. Bottery (2004, p.17) identifies these individuals as ‘transformational leaders’ because he argues, that besides providing a vision, which motivates their members of staff to embrace change and reform, they also inspire and urge their followers to remain committed to the reforms, especially when considering that ‘change cannot be accomplished overnight’ (Fullan, 2007, p.40). Although the humane dimension of leadership, with a clear focus on the personal and the collective drive is its strength, it can also be deemed as its Achilles heel (Hopkins, 2005). He adds that while, the transformational dimensions are important to change

and development, they only indirectly influence student performance since the transformational approach is mainly focused on developing the motivational aspects and empowerment factors within the organisation. It is undoubtedly important not to ignore the moral and human dimensions behind leadership, for as Chapman (2005) argues we need to acknowledge the importance behind the human element. In fact, research helps to emphasise that in a context, which is becoming more prescriptive and performance-based, one tends to ignore these dimensions. Leithwood *et al.* (1999) argue we cannot ignore the importance behind the leader-follower dimension. The critical aspects behind transformational leadership, mainly charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration are essential for improvement and will enhance the learning opportunities of others (Vidoni *et al.*, 2008). The main thread behind the arguments being presented here is that leaders increase a group's productivity by helping everyone to achieve the school's vision.

The implications for the concept of governance and governing of the institutions involved in the context of collaboration, as treated by literature will be discussed in the subsequent section of Chapter 3.

### **3.4 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Governance and Governing**

#### **3.4.1 Introduction**

The primary research question addresses the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. One of the subsidiary questions of the study central to educational governance and governing explores the probable implications for educational governance and governing in the context of such collaboration. The intention of this section is to engage with the literature central to the subsidiary theme of educational governance and governing that shall serve as basis for the understanding of the implications that the above mentioned form of collaboration may possibly create. A full understanding of governance and good educational governance (particularly school governance), which is considered crucial for schools to function well (Gruber, 1999), provides a fundamental starting point to the understanding of governance processes so as to provide a context for understanding the newly formed colleges. Section (3.3) embodies a number of sub-sections that develop as follows:

- 3.4.1 presents a short introduction that ends with an overview of the various sub-themes that emerge;
- 3.4.2 gives an indication of the complex nature around the meaning of governance and visits educational and school governance;
- 3.4.3 examines workings of educational governance and governing in today's context, where I visit the issues of centralisation and decentralisation;
- 3.4.4 focuses on school governance and the way ahead;
- 3.4.5 explores the theme of school governance and management responsibilities;
- 3.4.6 visits models of governance, particularly shared governance.

### 3.4.2 Meanings around Governance

James *et al.* (2008) claim that the concept of governance is gaining widespread currency despite the absence of a single agreed view on what governance means and embraces. The term 'governance' has brought on innumerable definitions and each depends on the context. For example: Macnamara (2005, p.1) defines governance as:

the combination of policies, systems, structures and a strategic/operational framework; which the governing body puts in place to ensure the leadership of the organization makes appropriate decisions, and takes appropriate actions to deliver services in an effective and accountable manner.

Ranson (2008) defines governance in terms of structured control and conformity; Stoker (1998) looks at governance from the lens of governing body or council that takes decisions and action collectively, and Ackerman (2004) defines it as a body that takes responsibility and is accountable to a number of stakeholders.

Such variability is illustrated further by the European Commission's 'European Governance' project and associated website (n.d.). The introduction starts by stating that: '...the term governance is a very versatile one. ...Referring to the exercise of power overall...' James *et al.* (2008, p.10) reinforce this view with their attempt to give a generic description as to what governance is concerned with by contending that: 'Governance in a general sense refers to the 'patterns of rule' which are concerned with regulation, direction and procedure.'

Considering the diverse keywords such as 'educational quality assurance', 'quality management', 'educational performance management', 'educational management' and 'school and educators accountability mandates', which relate to governance together with the wide range of players involved or have an invested interest in school governance, it comes as no surprise to read that 'a large part of governance is managing for and being accountable to a variety of stakeholders' (Carver, 1997 and others cited in Austen *et al.* 2012, p.73). Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour (2011, cites Lawn and Ozga, 2009) who present assessment results as a characteristic of governance in education. Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour (2011) establish a link between performance management, accountability and educational governance. They argue that schools and governing boards have been accrediting importance to funding and rating, which they add is rather worrying because it prompts the demand for better accountability.

One asks, is educational and school governance just about managing and accountability? If anything, is it that clear-cut? Considering the responsibilities that society bestows upon schools together with the restructuring taking place in schools, such as the introduction of networks, governance systems and structures increases the level of complexity in dealing with educational matters (James *et al.*, 2008). This problematic aspect combined with school governance is alluded to again by James *et al.*, (2011a) in their article on how school governing bodies function in diverse socio-economic and school performance settings. They state that there is 'a complex interplay between school governing, socio-economic context and school performance' (p.415). This continues to demonstrate that governance, particularly school governance is not that clear-cut but rather intricate; more so, when considering what Macnamara, (2005, p.1) argue about 'good governance':

Today and into the future, the standards for what makes “good governance” are rising, and demanding more time and attention... There is much more to good governance than simply adopting a particular model of governance.

### ***3.4.3 Educational Governance and Governing – Today’s Context***

The context is definitely crucial to our understanding of governance and how it can unfold and affect policy making and implementation. Focusing on contemporary education reforms, particularly those addressing decentralisation and school autonomy, one observes that school governance is gaining a diverse spectrum of parties with particular responsibilities. It happens because of the concept of empowered and shared-decision-making at school level (Caldwell, 2005).

#### ***1. Educational governance and centralisation***

Sergiovanni *et al.* (2009) contend that when public education depends on government funding, it is very difficult for that education system to be apolitical. Government intervention, regulation and influence is the norm in a number of countries because the ‘(m)arket prerogatives now drive educational policy and influence school governance’ (Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour, 2011, p.103), and in most countries education has always been expected to empower children and young people with skills that will enable them to learn further throughout life and actively engage in society (Hopkins, 2005). Additionally, because societies have delegated the important responsibility of imparting knowledge and the teaching process to schools, central governments play a role in the educational policies and legislations of their respective countries. Austen *et al.* (2012, p.80) substantiates the increasing involvement of central governments in their education system when in their paper, which studies the organization of governance in non-state schools in Australia, they conclude: ‘Government has expressed some intention to increase regulation, partly reflecting international trends in the state sector.’ Consequently the education systems, worldwide, adopt centralised or semi-centralised models.

When governments control policies that affect education and schools, educators are compelled to follow. Policies and strategies flow down authoritatively from government to schools (Merchant, 2002). Studies (Caldwell *et al.*, 2006 and Austen *et al.*, 2012) acknowledge that the UK government plays a central role in its education system and can lead us to presume that centralisation seems to be the government’s objective. Sergiovanni *et al.* (2009, p.236) states that in the United States ‘public schools are increasingly dominated by politics at every level of policymaking.’ Literature (Edward, 2002 and Merchant, 2002) continues to demonstrate that centralisation is reflected in a ‘top-down’ culture not only in large states but also in small states. Edward (2002, p.237) maintains that ‘small states are not immune from the problems of centralisation and bureaucratisation...’ when he discusses decentralisation education in St Lucia in the Caribbean. Merchant (2002, p.226), on the other hand, does not only claim that ‘the education system in Antigua and Barbuda is highly centralised,’ but adds that their education system is the legacy of British colonization.

#### ***2. Educational governance and decentralisation***

Sergiovanni *et al.* (2009) argues that the majority of educators have always held that ideally education and politics should not be in tandem. They (2009, p.229) contend that those in favour of separating education from politics hold that:

Educational decisions should always be made without resorting to politics of any kind. Schools and those who work in them and run them should remain pure, untainted by the evils of politics.

Giving schools greater autonomy from central control seems to be on the rise globally. Policy makers in such countries seem to have realised that centralisation does not work. Fullan's (1995, p.37) statement that 'centralisation errs on the side of overcontrol' seems to offer a possible reason as to why centralisation is no longer considered relevant and tenable for education to go forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In addition, Edward (2002) offers explanations why large and small states have been moving towards a decentralised model of educational governance. He (2002, p.238) contends that:

A significant aspect of current decentralisation trends is that they facilitate and encourage more effective popular participation, ownership and commitment within an overall development process. Decentralisation policies...engender a new distribution of authority through the establishment of an administrative structure where the state releases itself from a number of traditional functions in order to concentrate and focus its activities in strategic areas...

However, moving towards a decentralised model of governance does not come without implications for both the Central Authorities and the schools. Both groups need to reflect, adopt new roles and if needs be relinquish or take on new responsibilities. Edward (2002, p.251), in discussing the issue of designing a scheme for decentralisation argues:

A scheme of decentralisation requires that the central office reflects on each of its functions and asks which of them could be best administered at the school or local level. ... Whatever the nature and the extent of the decentralisation introduced, all parties have to assume new roles and increased responsibilities.

Edward (2002, p.251) continues to argue about what real decentralisation model of school governance actually signifies and entails:

It is only when decentralisation is accompanied by a real change in the decision-making process, involving greater popular participation, that there will be true modification in the distribution of power.

### 3. *Governance – Crossing the divide between centralisation and decentralisation*

Although centralized systems are met with criticism, will transforming education systems from centralisation to decentralisation be enough? Although the demand towards decentralisation has increased over the last decades, it is acknowledged that it does not come without complications and stress for governing bodies, educational leaders and teachers Sergiovanni *et al.* (2009). James *et al.* (2011b, p.429) in discussing the results of their research maintain that 'governing bodies face a number of pressures.' They also argue that because of the dynamics of governance networks, 'the school governance system itself will be vulnerable to wider social, political and economic forces...' (2011b, p.394) Sergiovanni *et al.* (2009) add that when 'many stakeholders seek to impose multiple values on public schools' (p.235) there can be 'considerable conflict for school leaders' (p.235).

Fullan (1995, p.38) believes in the need of a 'two-way relationship of pressure, support and continuous negotiation', which 'amounts to simultaneous top-down and bottom-up influence.' It can

be considered crucial for education institutions to establish a balanced system that can allow particular centralised practices to exist in tandem with the ‘appropriate’ latitude for schools to make a difference within a decentralised setting.

Decentralisation of decision authority implies devolution of authoritative power leading to a new model of governance, which will demand the learning of new skills: communication; management; negotiation; and conflict resolution amongst others. Not only that, but all those involved in the governance and governing of schools will need to revisit the understanding of their responsibilities, what it signifies and necessitates being a member of a governing board. Again James *et al.* (2011a, p.426) argue that: ‘(i)n those cases where governing had failed in the past, the evidence indicated that the governing body did not understand its task.’ Achieving this may take time, practice, support and the unlearning and learning of new ways of doing things. It also implies engaging in new forms of decision making, of collaborating and adopting collegial approaches to work, which previously did not exist both within schools and with education authorities.

#### **3.4.4 School Governance**

As societies moved away from the industrial era and were attracted to the attainment of knowledge and education, schools became central to society and eventually to educational research. Schools have, since then continued to gain significance because:

- they are at the heart of all education systems;
- they lay the foundations for future societies;
- they play a crucial role in forming good citizens (Ranson, 2011);
- they have ‘...the demanding and vital role of developing the potential of children and young people’ (Bush and Middlewood, 2006, p.viii).

Such growth is reflected in the expanse of the literature on the subject (Barber *et al.*, 1995b; Earley and Creese, 1999; Gann, 1998; James *et al.*, (2008) Ofsted; (1994); Stoll and Fink (2003); Thomas and Martin (1996) and Weindling and Earley (1987).

An early interpretation (Riley and MacBeath cited in MacBeath, ed. 1998, p.176) presented a review on the debate on the notions of ‘good’ and ‘effective’ schools. In their claim, which seems to place schools as essential to society and its political milieu, they acknowledge that:

The notion of a good school is a social construct, shaped by national expectations and local aspirations. Equally, the notion of an effective school is socially constructed. Both notions rest on a belief that schools can make a difference...

In addition, Ranson (2011, p.411), in the concluding comments of his paper on ‘the governance of school improvement’ addresses the benefits of governance in the learning sector. He adds that:



...governance matters because: it strengthens the practices which secure institutional performance; it mediates the social and cultural conditions that engage young people in their learning; and it constitutes the practices of engagement, participation and deliberation which secure that mediation. (p.411)

The interest in school governance among researchers is growing, particularly owing to the impact that schools can have on individuals and because 'school governing is an important part of the governance of education systems around the world' (James *et al.*, 2011, p.394). School governance has continued to gain mileage in research (Gaziel, 2008 and Wallace, 1996) and in the educational sector because:

- of the improved democratic participation in schools;
- of the onus that has been assigned to governing bodies, school councils and individual educators to ensure that their schools and colleges not only provide and sustain good quality education but ensure that students get their entitlement and achieve the milestones that can take them into adult life.

James *et al.* (2008) address the importance of a renewed structure for school governance. They maintain that there is room for improvement and '...it will need to change if it is to respond to the ways schools are changing' (p.4). The literature (Caldwell *et al.*, 2006; Ranson *et al.*, 2005a cited in James *et al.*, 2011; ACARA, 2009 and James *et al.*, 2011) demonstrates that the practice of governance seems to be improving because governing bodies are taking an active, often strategic role since performance monitoring is becoming a key function of any governing body.

### *1. The way ahead – School governance as a network*

Considering the interrelationship and diverse interest of the different parties involved in the educational journey of the child, perhaps the way forward is to perceive school governance as a network. James *et al.* (2011a, p.394) underlined the perception of governance as a network when they maintained that 'the conceptualization of school governance as a network is valuable.' Additionally, when they discuss the issue of school governance, they introduce the notion of 'governance capital' (p.429). They define 'governance capital' as 'the network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governance of any particular school.'

James *et al.* (2011a) also recognised the complex nature of school governance because of the wide range of players involved and their extensive responsibilities. In addition, citing Kjaer (2004) they acknowledged that because of the 'continual and dynamic interactions of network actors, and shifts in the rules,...governance networks are in a continual state of flux' (James *et al.* 2011a, p.394). James *et al.* (2011a) also recognised that the members of governing boards can have a diverse mix and changes over time. Consequently, they (2011a, p.429) assert that:

...a school's governance capital can be built and needs to be. Further, it will need to be drawn upon continuously in a range of ways because of the turnover of governors resulting from their limited period of tenure.

Additionally, James *et al.* (2011a) seem to highlight the need for a reflective and analytical exercise of school governance as a network to try and overcome complexities that may arise, when they (2011a) argue that perceiving school governance as a network:

...calls for an analytic framework for understanding: the 'location' of actors in the network; and what guides and forms their actions and their modes of working.(p.394)

Hence, given the lack of stability and continuity one recommends caution as to how school governing bodies are constituted and function because they can be both a strength and a weakness.

### **3.4.5 School Governance and Management Responsibilities**

As a result of contemporary educational reforms and the concept of empowered and shared decision-making at school level (Caldwell, 2005) school governance has established a diverse spectrum of parties with particular responsibilities. Consequently management responsibilities and their respective boundaries of school governance need to be defined and established clearly. We can no longer have a situation where:

(t)he governing of schools appears to be unnecessarily complicated by the use of a number of terms in a rather confusing and often contradictory way.  
James *et al.* (2008, p.9)

The intricate system known as site-based management (SBM) has become '...a model of shared decision-making involving various stakeholders, and facilitative leadership at the school level' (Gaziel, 2008, p.20). This managerial pattern can involve a range of groups or individuals with assigned responsibilities, for example; board of governors, school councils, principals, Heads of School, teachers and student councils.

The complex structural web, the intricate interrelationship of the members of the groups and individuals directly involved '... in strategic school improvement decisions' (Stoll and Fink, 2003, p.47) together with the fact that some members of governing boards can have a rather tenuous connection with the school or college, demands that school governance keeps on receiving the attention it deserves and researched further. Not only that, but this state of affairs engenders the need to assign clear points of responsibility and accountability, and the importance of goal setting, performance indicators and standards.

### **3.4.6 Models of School Governance**

Ranson (2011) in his research, which studied the nature of the roles of the governing body, distinguishes between weaker and stronger types of governance. He considers 'an executive board (power sharing)' and 'governance as a governing body that exercises the most complete public authority' (pp.400-401) as the stronger types. In both types, Ranson (2011) argues in favour of a partnership between the school and the governing body and where the Head of School will oversee the academic and professional areas and the governing body will focus on the business side of the school. He (2011 p.401) believes that the 'overarching jurisdiction and responsibility for conduct and direction of the school' belongs to the governing body and that the Head of School is one of the members of this governing body. Ranson (2011, p.405) expounds on the task of governance as a collective one:

The distinctive task of governance is to 'constitute' a public sphere to undertake those activities which individuals cannot do alone, but only together, collectively.

Ranson, (2011) seems to highlight the organisation of shared governance, which Burke (2010, p.52) argued 'distributes organisational power and responsibilities.' Burke (2010, p.52) adds that 'the principles of shared governance in theory help to clarify the implied key values of distributed leadership.' Such model of governance allows people to realize that once they collaborate they become responsible. Once one becomes responsible then one is held accountable for things s/he has participated in creating.

Literature (Austen *et al.*, 2012) in discussing the question of school governance also examines this issue in non-state schools. When discussing the question of appropriate models of school governance they suggest the need of other models besides the existing ones:

- Trustee model (the government would be represented on the board);
- Democratic model (membership would be open to the school community);
- Business model (the organization would be run as a business enterprise);
- Decentralised/democratic model (members of the whole school community is involved);
- Faith model (members of the board would be active in the faith).

Other literature (Gibton, 2011; Heystek, 2011 and James *et al.* 2011b) focuses on the issue of parental model involvement. These researchers in their studies address the involvement of parents in school governance in Israel, South Africa and England respectively. All studies seem to suggest that although the involvement of parents in school governance is strong, particularly in Israel (Gibton, 2011) or recommended, it does not come without complications. James *et al.* (2011b, p.424) found that 'participation by parent governors appeared to be particularly problematic.' They add that 'both male and female parent governors' (p.424), regardless of the settings but particularly those in an ethnically varied environment, were observed not to participate in the meetings. In their discussion, James *et al.* (2011b) continue to add that leaders of schools and members of school governing boards have a noteworthy role and the responsibility to encourage people to become members of the board. They (2011b, p.430) ascertain that building governance capital:

...may encompass nurturing parents who may have the potential to be good governors but initially lack the motivation, and seeking members of the local community who may have the necessary qualities.'

On the other hand, Gibton (2011) observes that in Israel parents are very involved in school governing bodies. However, he also acknowledges that participation in school governing bodies is 'haphazard and suffers from a difficult discrepancy between areas, types of schools and SES...' (p.444) He (2011 p.447) seems to acknowledge that 'Israel's education system is not congruent with any of the governance models...' that exist worldwide. Gibton (2011, p.448) asserts that 'Israel's governors of schools involves many stakeholders...' and the end result is '...one of fierce contest for power over education.' He (2011 p.449) concludes that '...governance is not part of orderly public debated in

Israel.’ His conclusion seems to present a rather bleak picture of school governance in Israel because he acknowledges that because of the present scenario, the future remains dubious. Within this scenario, Connolly and James (2011) argue that because school governance is crucial, even though it is characterised by debates and controversies, more studies in this field are required.

Finally, the implications for the concept of accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved in the context of collaboration, as treated by literature will be discussed in the final section of Chapter 3.

## **3.5 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Accountability Relationships**

### ***3.5.1 Introduction***

The implementation of educational reforms, in the last decade or so, has called for greater accountability (Leithwood and Earl, 2000). They add that such attention and importance given to accountability ‘can be traced to the wider economic, political, and social contexts of which schools are a part’ (p.1).

The primary research question addresses the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. The third subsidiary question of the study central to educational accountability relationships explores the probable implications for educational accountability relationships in the context of such collaboration. The intention of this section is to engage with the literature central to the subsidiary theme of educational accountability relationships that shall serve as basis for the understanding of the implications that the above mentioned form of collaboration may possibly create. Section (3.4) incorporates a number of sub-sections:

- 3.5.1 introduces the subsidiary theme of accountability relationships by highlighting the reason for the demand for better accountability and the sub-sections that make-up section (3.4);
- 3.5.2 draws attention to the complex nature and definitions around educational accountability;
- 3.5.3 explores the conceptions of accountability, such as what it means to be accountable, accountability and schools, and accountability and school development
- 3.5.4 visits the concepts of centralisation and decentralisation surrounding accountability;
- 3.5.5 explores issues surrounding accountability;
- 3.5.6 examines internal and external evaluations as two central concepts of the accountability pendulum;
- 3.5.7 explores the understanding of intelligent accountability that highlights the importance of trust, which places the accountability discourse on a new plain.

### ***3.5.2 Defining Accountability***

As a point of departure it is crucial to have an understanding of educational accountability given that it is considered complex by nature but significantly crucial to help stakeholders understand the

association between school systems and schools (Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour, 2011). They attempt to offer a possible reason for this complex feature of accountability when they argue that ‘(o)ne reason why accountability is such a complex concept is that different value systems are involved and there is tension among them’ (p.104). Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour, (2011, p.104) add that:

‘...the definition most commonly applied is in terms of control and giving an account to those in authority,...In this pure form accountability is tied up with power and control because some form of constraint or sanction may be expected if the account given by the accountable body to the delegating authority is unsatisfactory.’

An early definition of educational accountability (Rothman 1995, p.189, cited in Leithwood and Earl, 2000, p.2) reads as the ‘process[es] by which school districts and states attempt to ensure that schools and school systems meet their goals.’ Leithwood and Earl (2000) add that ‘such focus on goals’ (p.2) implies that the process of accountability is put in place so as to guide schools towards the established goals. Additionally, Wagner (1987) considers the drawing up of obligatory reports by schools, (even in their simplest form) as accountability procedures. Such consideration by Wagner (1987) shows similarity to Kogan’s (1986) definition of accountability:

(a) condition under which a role holder renders an account to another so that a judgement may be made about the adequacy of the performance

Considering that the above definitions suggest that the concept of accountability is linked with responsibility and it is justified by drawing up reports, review of the literature central to educational accountability will move on to the conceptions of accountability amplifying further the definitions around accountability.

### ***3.5.3 The Conceptions of Accountability***

#### ***1. What it means to be accountable***

Researchers agree that accountability is significant in any organisation because when we are answerable to others, we would be held responsible for our actions. Furthermore, being responsible for our actions can make us morally bound to our behaviour and activities. Hence, James *et al.* (2008, p.30) consider accountability to be a concept in ethics that ‘...usually carries with it a sense of being responsible for something and answerable to another for the discharging of that responsibility.’ No matter how unpleasant accountability may appear, it is needed and central to education. Bezzina (2009, p.463) argues that:

Accountability is the principle that all in education, who have a responsibility for the provision of good education, give an account about their targets, their actual achievement and performance and their plans for improvement.’

#### ***2. Accountability and schools***

As in other organizations, those involved in the teaching and learning process are expected to be responsible and accountable for their performance, particularly when we reflect on the responsibility that society has relegated to schools and their practitioners. In this climate, the professional role of

educators can be threatened because they may have to sacrifice their professional responsibilities. School leaders and practitioners can feel vulnerable because of the constraints of accountability primarily to the government, having to conform to the central government's policies; parents, the students and even the community. Appreciating this scenario, one is inclined to concur with MacBeath's, (2006) assertion that educational accountability is now more demanding for schools and consequently have to work within high stakes accountability structures. The pressure on schools to deliver (MacBeath, 2006) has increased because '...the demand for better results and more efficient use of resources keeps intensifying' (Boyd, 1997, p.10, cited in Bush (1999b) in Lumby and Foskett eds. 1999, p.7).

Earley and Creese (1999) in Lumby and Foskett (1999, p.101) argue that '... it seems only right and proper that schools should be held to account by the community for the education provided.' Leithwood and Earl (2000) in their arguments offer similar claims to Earley and Creese (1999) as to why there has been an increase in demand for accountability. Leithwood and Earl (2000, p.1) contend that:

the reasons for the call for greater accountability can be traced to the wider economic, political, and social contexts of which schools are a part.

Understandably, considering the above arguments and the way educators perform in schools, can impact the concept of accountability. Appreciating the diverse nature of professional educators in schools, it is common knowledge that certain educators may prefer to work alone, whilst others are ready to work with other individuals. As expected, when professional educators work individually, they alone are considered accountable for their work. However, when professional stakeholders work collaboratively, then the responsibility for that work will be shared. Consequently, they will be engaging in what can be referred to as collaborative accountability because everyone concerned in the education of the child is accountable. It will become 'a shared obligation among those responsible' (Leithwood and Earl, 2009, p.4). But, can we say that what Leithwood and Earl (2009) claim is problem free given the accountability control under which schools today have to work, and the diversity of the human mind-set? There are a number of factors that one needs to consider, such as:

- having a school leader who abdicates leadership authority and the teachers are expected to be held accountable when they do not see themselves as the ones responsible;
- the lack of ownership where individual teachers do not show the same level of concern for students in other classes as they do for their own;
- the timetable schedule and layout of the classrooms in the school together with other factors can limit collaboration.

One then asks: Is it acceptable to have all the members of the school shouldering "a shared obligation"? (Leithwood and Earl, 2009, p.4). Collaborative accountability can exist if there is the correct form of collaborative practice in the school and for this to be present 'there has to be cognizance of the human elements that influence the process' (Slater, 2006, p.216).

### *3. Accountability and school development*

Hopkins (2005) argues persuasively in favour of accountability, contending that it starts with self-evaluation, and considers accountability as one of the policies that drives school improvement. Such view is underlined by other studies (Devos and Verhoeven, 2003 and MacBeath and McGlynn, 2002).

According to Leung (2005) School Self-Evaluation (SSE) was employed as a global approach among school practitioners since 1970 because it fosters school development and accountability. Leung (2005) contends that accountability and school development can take place if the school practitioners and leaders receive the appropriate support that will help them adopt new practices and undergo the needed culture change. Leung (2005, p.4 cites Fullan, 2001 and Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1994) to substantiate the claim that:

If conditions are there to ensure a professional team which will keep learning and make constant improvement, accountability will not become an obstacle to school development.

Robinson and Timperley (2000, p.66), who offer conditions that can make educational accountability directly linked to student achievement; contend that under the right conditions, 'accountability might produce improvement.' They (2000, p.69) also argue that:

...accountability promotes improvement when the accountable agents accept the validity of the judgement made about their performance, accept appropriate responsibility for improvement, and have the capacity to achieve it.

However, although it has been argued that accountability can manifest itself in monitoring the standards of school performance and student achievement, it also became a topic for debate when considering its function within school development (Leung, 2005). Some literature (Edward, 2002 and Leung, 2005) speaks about accountability as critical to school improvement, while other studies (Clift *et al.*, 1987 and Rudd and Davies, 2000 among others cited in Leung, 2005) discuss the presence of a 'dilemmatic relationship between school development and accountability' (Leung, 2005, p.3). Robinson and Timperley (2000) argue that although the contribution of accountability to student improvement is debatable (Clift *et al.*, 1987 and Nuttall, 1981), it cannot be dismissed completely. Additionally, Robinson and Timperley (2000, p.72) maintain that accountability:

may contribute to such improvement by increasing the knowledge of educators, parents, politicians, and the public at large about the consequences of current practices and policies.

Such diversity of opinion about the concept of accountability and the controversy (Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernor, 2011) surrounding it as a function to maintain standards continues to underline the complex nature of accountability.

Finally, as a result of the association between accountability and school development, accountability is considered by many (Austen *et al.*, 2012; Beck and Murphy, 2000; Briggs and Wohlstetter, 2003 and James *et al.*, 2008) as an important facet of governance; a means to monitor developments both from an internal and external perspective. Within the school context, the move towards greater devolution of authority to the school site places the issue of governance at the centre of school life and hence its link to accountability paramount.

### ***3.5.4 Accountability – Centralisation versus Decentralisation***

In a centralised or partially centralised model, schools are expected to meet the targets set by society or governments (Leithwood and Earl, 2009). The Centralised model of accountability emerges as an issue of controversy among researchers. Dempster and Logan (2002, p.83) regard ‘central accountability measures’ rather favourably because such measures ‘enforce uniformity by requiring the school to meet government regulations.’ One may be inclined to agree with Dempster and Logan (2002) for the need of centralised policies because such policies can possibly ensure that students are provided with their entitlement of a quality education. Furthermore, centralisation can also foster standards and improve performance (Leithwood and Earl, 2009).

Conversely, other literature (Ainscow and Howes, 2007; Bezzina, 2006; Bush, 2008 and Connolly and James, 2011) shows that education authorities need to slowly but surely learn to let go of particular decision making and also, adequately prepare school leaders to take greater responsibility for college based/school-based matters. Research (Caldwell, 2005; Gok *et al.*, 2005 and Lieberman, 1999) also shows that the networking model gives schools more responsibility and empowered decision-making at school level. The need to move away from centralisation, allowing schools more freedom and responsibility is a learning curve for those working both at central level as well as those working in schools (Dempster and Logan, 2002). The process of educational decentralisation is frankly seen as an attempt to make schools become essentially self-directing. Consequently, the outcome of decentralisation means that schools are handed more responsibilities, and the end result is that school leaders and teachers become more accountable for their decisions and practices (Bezzina, 2009; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009).

A study undertaken by the European Commission (Eurydice, 2007, p.16) notes that ‘overall, after three decades of massive change, the policy of school autonomy is now widespread throughout most European countries.’ The top-down model that is used provides a solid framework for the new model of school autonomy, which brings with it more ‘accountability mechanisms’ (Eurydice, 2007, p.43) even though with increasing central control.

### ***3.5.5 Issues Surrounding Accountability***

The Head of School plays a central role on the question of accountability. It is an accepted fact that the Head of School is legally the responsible individual for the day-to-day running of the school. However, in a context of shared responsibility one needs to see whether the Head of School is held to account or if the whole school community is held responsible for decisions taken.

Leithwood and Earl (2000) argued and questioned whether the professional individual or the educational community for instruction is held accountable for the pupil or the school performance. They contended that enhancing pupils’ performance depends on a number of factors and that there are many influences at play. Consequently, it does not depend solely on the teacher’s teaching methodology and content. Leithwood and Earl (2000, p.5) maintain that:

Although the quality of teachers’ instruction is important, it is significantly influenced by such factors over which the community or the government – not the teacher or the school – has control, such as the physical condition of the school building, the size of classes, the time available for teachers to prepare for classes, and the like.



Leithwood and Earl (2000) consider it unfair that one person is held accountable when the 'expected' performances entail the input of other influences and factors. Here, one needs to consider the overarching perspective of the contextual landscape in which the school leader works, which can impact and determine the accountability parameters. If the Head of School has the individual leader mentality and tends to be patriarchal/matriarchal, meaning that decision taking is his/her prerogative, then it is only right to hold one person responsible. But, if the school community adopts a collaborative style, and a collegial approach – as Wenger, 1998 argues about 'community of practice' – to leadership, then it is only fair to hold all the school members of staff accountable. Developing a common purpose based on a shared vision, together with shared decision making can cultivate ownership, which can lead to a sense of collaborative accountability. Additionally, in their discourse about professional-control site-based management Leithwood and Earl (2000) write about the dual effect of giving more empowerment to the teachers in school decision making and concurrently increasing teachers' accountability for students' performance. They (2000 p.7) maintain that:

This approach to accountability holds teachers, as a group, accountable to parents, students, and the district office for the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the school.

### ***3.5.6 Forms of Accountability – Internal and External Evaluation***

MacBeath (2006, p.17) when citing Elmore (2005), who distinguishes between internal and external accountability, contends that:

Internal accountability describes the conditions in a school that precede and shape the response of schools to pressure that originates in policies outside the organisation. The level or degree of internal accountability is measured by the degree of convergence among what individuals say they are responsible for (responsibility), what people say the organization is responsible for (expectations), and the internal norms and processes by which people literally account for their work (accountability structures).

Eurydice, one of the research arms of the European Commission, explored this area across its member states. Eurydice (2004) differentiates between external evaluation (entails the review and reporting on a school's work by people who are not part of the school's organisation), and internal evaluation (which is conducted by individuals who have direct connection with the mundane matters of the school; such as the Head, SMT members, teachers, and students). Furthermore, the concepts of these two systems of accountability are very often considered synonymous with external and internal auditing. Evaluators evaluate individuals (Heads of School or teachers) or the whole school as an entity (Eurydice, 2004). One of the points established in the general framework of the study (Eurydice, 2004, p.10) is that when teachers are evaluated on an individual basis, this evaluation 'is only considered in terms of the way it relates to the evaluation of schools.'

Eurydice (2004, p.23) also maintains that internal evaluation of schools as entities, which may be obligatory or optional, 'exists in all countries (except for Luxembourg and Bulgaria).' The study (Eurydice, 2004) shows that external evaluation may take two different forms: one conducted by an inspectorate accountable to the central government; and the second form conducted by two separate education authorities, such as happens in Denmark, Estonia, Poland, Sweden and United Kingdom. The norm is that external evaluation of schools as entities is obligatory and they are carried out routinely.

The document also adds that in certain countries, (Greece, Italy, Malta, Norway, and the French and German speaking communities of Belgium) external evaluation is not so prevalent but there is in place some form of evaluation system that evaluates the education system by taking into account students' attainment or auditing teachers on an individual basis. In the Nordic countries, excluding Iceland, external evaluation is the responsibility of the municipalities. In these countries evaluation is conducted by national agencies.

The document continues to evaluate the systems of external evaluation in different countries. According to the study (Eurydice, 2004) Ofsted in England and Estyn in Wales, have the power to go into schools and conduct external evaluations. The LEAs have the official right to promote high standards of education among other responsibilities, and visit the schools once a year but not to carry out inspections of schools. Eurydice (2004, p.31) contends that:

...Ofsted (in England) and Estyn (in Wales) have a legal duty to establish and maintain the system for the regular inspection of all publicly-funded schools. ...These inspections have three main purposes, mainly to hold schools accountable to parents and the local community, to help schools plan for improvement and to provide information on the national state of education.

It is a fact that while there is tension between external and internal evaluation, they are actually two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, we have to acknowledge that internal or self-evaluation is very slowly becoming the norm. According to MacBeath (2005), self-evaluation is a process during which the school practitioners together reflect on practice. He adds that it is an organised and transparent process whose objective is school and student improvement. The internal school self-evaluation process, which can involve all school practitioners, under the leadership of the school management team, will inform the school of any required changes that will foster student and school improvement (Joseph, 2002).

The internal or self-evaluation procedure entails on-going monitoring of any aspect of a school's work. It involves teachers and school leaders coming to judgements based on their first-hand knowledge of what is happening in classrooms and laboratories and dealing with all aspect of school life. Whenever existing education systems and provision are examined with a view to improvement, internal or self-evaluation is taking place. In effect, in a number of countries, education audit teams use internal evaluation as a starting point for the external evaluation of schools.

It is important to recognize that audits or school evaluations do not and will not undertake a one-size-fits-all approach to evaluation of practices. Schools are different. They are at different stages of development. They may be strong on some dimensions and in need of development in others. When audits are conducted professionally, they take into account the complexity of the schools' realities; they acknowledge the fact that in challenging circumstances, schools face a range of problems that may prevent significant improvements. Schools need to master the skills of evaluating their own practices in such a way that an external audit only serves to enlighten the internal discourse or shed new light on potential weak areas. The significance of internal accountability in schools is underlined by MacBeath (2006, p.17) when citing Elmore (2005): 'Elmore concludes that with strong internal accountability schools are likely to be more responsive to external pressures for performance.'

### **3.5.7 Intelligent Accountability**

Given the complex nature of accountability, the diverse field of inquiry that it offers and the negative effects that accountability may have, O'Neill (2002) argued for a change in the existing culture of accountability. Convinced that the current methods of accountability militate against trust, that are central to development, she believes in the need of what she coins as 'intelligent accountability' one that is based on trust; a form of accountability that would not damage professional performance. O'Neil (2002, n.p.) also argues for real accountability and contends that 'real accountability provides substantive and knowledgeable independent judgement of an institution's or professional's work.'

O'Neill (2002, n.p.) continues to claim that if we are to have intelligent accountability there needs to be less central control and more attention given to good governance. In her conclusion she maintains that:

Serious and effective accountability, I believe, needs to concentrate on good governance, on obligations to tell the truth and needs to seek intelligent accountability.

Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour (2011, p.107) attempt to explain what intelligent accountability (as proposed by O'Neill, 2002, n.p.) implies, when they contend that:

Intelligent accountability therefore implies trust in professionals and measures that do not distort the purposes of schooling and encourage the fullest development of every pupil.'

Furthermore, in their discussion on 'intelligent accountability' Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour (2011) recommend a two-fold proposal for accountability to become truly intelligent. They believe that:

- the association between accountability and educational purposes needs to be reviewed so that personalised learning and the enhancement of all students is fostered and sustained;
- the rapport between the leaders of schools or colleges and the education authorities should be reviewed and given a new conceptual framework to establish 'a communitarian approach to governance and collaborative decision making at a local level.' (Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour (2011, p.111)

Globally, especially across the EU, schools have undergone many reforms in the past 20 years, especially those addressing the different aspects of school management and the control or accountability mechanisms in place (Figel, 2007) While the drive for accountability may be viewed by principals, heads of school, and teachers as intrusive and controlling, few disagree it has its place in a playing field where the institutions have been delegated by society to prepare pupils for the ever changing world. Ultimately any definition of accountability needs to emphasise the question: 'Who are we here for?'

## **3.6. Overall Summary**

In summary, my approach has been to capture and illuminate the discourse related to the scope and diversity of the literature around the primary theme collaboration, followed by the three subsidiary

themes of educational leadership and management, governance and governing, and accountability relationships. I also strove to identify the various sub-themes that emerged from issues around the literature central to these four key themes.

All this has helped me formulate the theoretical framework of my research and establish the conceptual model of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by the individual schools, as the primary theme together with the implications of educational leadership, governance and accountability as the secondary themes in the context of such collaboration. It has also helped me realise that there is much we do not know about collaboration, leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability relationships in the newly formed context in the Maltese Islands.

### ***3.6.1 Primary Theme – Collaboration***

The first section of the chapter explores some of the key theoretical perspectives, particularly: Actor Network Theory, Activity Theory, Social Capital and Communities of Practice. The section also highlights the literature that identified the networking model as central to collaboration and taking contemporary systems of education forward. I have also briefly discussed the concept of educational networks that served as the basis for the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) that was meant to spearhead the reforms within Maltese education. I then moved on to the concept of collaboration about which literature (e.g. Bezzina, 2006; Chapman, 2008; Chapman *et al.*, 2010 and Sergiovanni, 2006) accedes that it complements and fuses with the system of networks. The literature also shows that intra- and inter-school collaboration endeavour fosters shared visions, and encourages the sharing of good practice at both school and classroom levels. I also demonstrate that such a combination helps, not only to solve ‘the top-down/bottom-up dilemma’ (Chapman and Fullan, 2007, p.209) but also augment improvement in schools.

The review not only highlights the benefits and how professional educators, students and schools stand to gain, but also offers an opportunity to understand the tensions and challenges that develop and reveals the emerging debates around collaborative and networked learning. As a final point I believe that when one reviews the theme of networking and collaboration, particularly the benefits for students and schools; one needs to explore the issue of intra and inter-school partnerships and the wider community.

### ***3.6.2 The Subsidiary Themes***

I reviewed the literature (e.g. Chapman *et al.*, 2010; Crawford, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2006; James *et al.*, 2008; Joseph, 2002 and Sergiovanni *et al.*, 2009) central to the three subsidiary themes (educational leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability) and the implications for them in the context of the form of collaboration set by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) for the Maltese Education System. The literature highlighted the central debates and challenges around the subsidiary themes. Engaging with the existent literature has helped me to formulate certain subsidiary themes on which I have formulated the essence of my semi-structured interview questions. The subsidiary themes follow:

- the form of leadership and management required, together with the dynamic nature of school governance and the form of accountability demanded by society;
- the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders;

- the issues and the transformation from a centralized to decentralized system;
- the complex and demanding competencies required for, and participation in, leading, managing and governing schools;
- the models of leadership, governance and accountability required that would sustain a collaborative and collegial endeavour

The review of the literature has helped me acquire a better understanding of the topic under study. It helped me to gain insights into the way the main theme and various sub-themes have been explored, researched and debated. I have carried out a synthesis of the main ideas being discussed and debated from both a research and normative perspective. Finally, it has helped me identify and justify the design and methodology most appropriate to collect data and the methodical approaches that I employed, and which will be addressed in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4 – The Research Methodology**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter explains, justifies and critically appraises the research methodology. It will focus on aspects that are related to the methodology and present the decision-making process used to address both the main research question and three other subsidiary ones: a process that extended over a period of five years.

The introduction (Section 4.0) is followed by Section 4.1, where I present the research study. Section 4.1 includes subsections on:

- 4.1.1 aims and research questions;
- 4.1.2 the research process;
- 4.1.3 the research paradigms;
- 4.1.4 the study undertaken.

The subsequent Section 4.2 addresses the research design and covers:

- 4.2.1 the framework of the study;
- 4.2.2 data collection;
- 4.2.3 the two phases of the research.

The research context (Section 4.3) follows. It comprises:

- 4.3.1 an overall picture of the study;
- 4.3.2 the context for Phase One interviews;
- 4.3.3 the context for Phase Two interviews.

I then discuss the ontological and human nature considerations behind the study (Section 4.4). A description of the interviews' sample (Section 4.5) and the ethical considerations for the study (Section 4.6) are then presented. These sections are followed by a discussion on validity, reliability and triangulation (Section 4.7).

Section (4.8) presents the data collection and incorporates:

- 4.8.1 the research technique of the interviews;
- 4.8.2 covers a discussion on the individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews, the timetable followed in gathering the data, the setting of the interviews, the procedure I adhered to and the structure of the interview schedule;
- 4.8.3 a discussion on the observation sessions;
- 4.8.4 a discussion on the review of official documents.

Subsequent Section (4.9) focuses on the limitations of the study. The data analysis is discussed in Section (4.10), followed by the literature review (Section 4.11) and the concluding comments (Section 4.12) end the chapter.

### **4.1 The Research**

#### ***4.1.1 The Aim and Research Questions***

The primary aim of this research was to analyse the current intra- and inter-school collaboration process. On the other hand the subsidiary aim was to learn what implications there were, if any, for

leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability relationships in and between the institutions involved.

The study addressed one primary and three subsidiary research questions.

Primary research question:

***What is the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint-working by individual schools?***

Subsidiary research questions:

In the context of such collaboration:

1. *What are the implications for the leadership and management of the institutions involved?*
2. *What are the implications for the governance and governing of the institutions involved?*
3. *What are the implications for accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved?*

In developing the research questions and the methodology I established the model of collaboration or joint working as the primary theme and the implications of educational leadership, governance and accountability (as secondary themes) in the context of collaboration. I framed an understanding that in my research collaboration was an organizing meta-concept, since my study focused on the joint-working endeavours between teachers and their school leaders and schools and colleges working together. I was also aware that at times I used the term networks, because that was how the colleges were initially referred to in Malta. However, I had also come to understand that since school leaders and their staff and schools were working together, that was actually joint working. After all the etymological derivation of collaboration was joint working, co-labour. That was my meta-concept, analysing intra- and inter-school collaboration /joint working in the new Maltese colleges.

#### **4.1.2 The Research Process**

The general purpose of this research was to contribute to the knowledge and the understanding of the narratives and perceptions of the relevant stakeholders about the introduced reforms through a synthesis of theoretical perspectives derived from the collected evidence complemented by a review of the existing related literature. The data was obtained by means of empirical research undertaken in two phases in the respective primary and secondary schools of the four selected Colleges for the study.

The research process started with the investigatory stage, which consisted mainly of personal reviews of the Act: *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006), the seminal document *For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta (FACTS)* (MEYE, 2005) and other relevant documents. At this stage the research problem was identified and the research questions formulated. I then focused on choosing the appropriate research methodology design for the study. It entailed planning the survey approach, acquiring access and consent, and constructing the interview schedules. The next stages of the research process were taken up collecting

and analysing the data (including a cross-case analysis of the data gathered in both Phases of the study) respectively. The next stage of the study addressed the presentation and discussion of the findings. Subsequently I presented the theories that emerged, together with the conclusions and recommendations.

The primary objective of the research questions called for clear descriptive answers to the stakeholders' narratives and perceptions vis-à-vis the reforms I planned to provide answers through a review of official documents, semi-structured interviews and structured observations of College Council of Heads (CCoH) meetings. Consequently, the research questions required the application of qualitative research techniques that involved an interpretive and naturalistic approach towards my data, since I sought to try and understand as naturally as possible the take of the stakeholders about the wave of reforms that were initiated by the ratification of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). Consequently, the methodology applied in this study would thus be related to the interpretative approach, since I would be seeking 'to understand the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen *et al.*, 2003, p.22).

In Phase One, I reviewed official documents, conducted interview sessions with key interviewees (education policy-makers), the college and school leaders and a sample of teachers from College One; and observed College Council of Heads (CCoH) meetings. In Phase Two I reviewed again the official documents, conducted similar interview sessions with education policy-makers, colleges and school leaders and samples of teachers from three other Colleges (referred to by the pseudonyms College Five, Six, Seven), and observed CCoH meetings of these three colleges. I also revisited College One to explore whether perceptions had changed.

#### **4.1.3 Research Paradigms**

Thomas (2011) who maintains that social science researchers tend to follow one or both paradigms (namely positivism or/and interpretivism) to knowledge, maintains that researchers consider paradigms as established assumptions about the way research can be carried out. According to Thomas (2011) positivism, popular among researchers in the past, holds mainly that:

- only knowledge confirmed by the senses can be warranted as knowledge;
- researchers follow the scientific method;
- the researcher take an objective stance;
- the collected data produces new knowledge.

On the other hand, according to literature (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Neuman, 2003 and Thomas, 2011) interpretivism considers that:

- the world around us is abundant with knowledge that needs to be researched;
- any form of information is knowledge;
- interpretative research is interested in the way individuals interact and how they perceive the world around them;
- interpretative researchers conduct in-depth studies and engage themselves with the participants of the study.

Burrell and Morgan (1979), in their contribution to the area of research, maintain that social science researchers, directly or indirectly, approach their research via four philosophical assumptions:



ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology. They argue that ontology helps the researcher understand the different ways in which the world around us can be investigated and understood, and whether the collected data is real or the product of the participants' perception. Burrell and Morgan (1979) add that the assumptions of an epistemological nature deal with how researchers understand and communicate the knowledge that is collected. They also claim that the human nature assumptions are linked to issues of an ontological and epistemological nature since these address the relationship between human beings and their environment. Human nature assumptions help researchers in establishing whether the actions of human beings are conditioned by the environment (mechanistic view) or whether human beings play a leading role in the creation of their environment (deterministic stance) (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Finally, according to these authors the fourth set of assumptions of a methodological nature focus on the methodology researchers employ to conduct their studies. They also contend that the first three assumptions mentioned above have direct implications for the kind of study undertaken.

### *1. Key debates*

Burrell and Morgan (1979) claim that the above four philosophical assumptions have been immersed in controversy and consequently stimulate debate. They hold that the ontological assumption is characterised by the controversy between nominalism and realism. While nominalists have conceded that the social world is devoid of any form of 'real' structure, realists, hold that the social environment is made up of real structures, which form a social world with a reality in its own right (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

The epistemological debate centres on positivism and anti-positivism. Positivism holds that the social world teems with knowledge that needs to be discovered and that the researcher learns it by observing the social world that s/he studies. On the other hand, anti-positivism argues that the social world can only be understood by those who live in it and that the researcher has to immerse himself/herself in the context (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Another debate that evolves around the 'human nature' assumption centres on the relationship between human beings and society. The voluntarist view claims that man's actions are not determined by their environment, whereas the determinist view argues that man's actions are conditioned by their environment (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Finally, the methodological debate is between the ideographic and nomothetic approach to research. While the former emphasises the aspect of subjectivity and that the researcher has to engage with the environment in which the research is being undertaken, the nomothetic approach argues that research has to be systematic, controlled and empirical (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

### *2. Alternative designs*

The terms used for research strategies (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods designs) have been the subject of much diversity in the literature. Research strategies have been called strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 2009), approaches to inquiry (Creswell, 2007 cited in Creswell, 2009) and research methodologies (Mertens, 1998 cited in Creswell, 2009). For the purpose of this study I will refer to them by the terms 'designs' or 'styles'.

The quantitative and qualitative research designs not only have particular research techniques and tools but different characteristics that make them distinctive, (see Table 4.1). Neuman (2003)

claims that although quantitative and qualitative designs have distinctive characteristics, they complement each other.

Writing about the animosity between researchers who prefer the qualitative design to the quantitative and vice-versa, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that qualitative research is mainly criticised and challenged by the followers of positivism. Furthermore, these authors highlight contrasting characteristics between quantitative and qualitative research; mainly that while quantitative researchers focus on studying the presence of any correlation between the variables identified in the study, qualitative researchers study how social reality is created and given meaning. An understanding of the characteristics of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods as well as their relative strengths and limitations can be gained by reviewing Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: The Nature of Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Designs**

Design/Style	Characteristics	Strengths	Limitations
<b>Qualitative</b>	<p>Qualitative research is heterogeneous in nature.</p> <p>Use various methodologies that give it the appearance of a bricolage.</p> <p>Qualitative researchers follow an interpretive approach to knowledge.</p> <p>A research strategy that underlines the inductive approach – generated theory.</p> <p>Highlights the human factor. Consequently refers to as an idiographic approach.</p>	<p>Researcher close to the participants – has personal insight of the research setting and the relationship between the participants and their environment.</p> <p>Researchers stress trustworthiness.</p> <p>Researcher studies the behaviour and perceptions of the participants in relation to their environment.</p> <p>Data is rich and reflects an in-depth understanding of the context.</p> <p>Gives importance to the participant's perception. It highlights the narratives and discourse of the participants.</p> <p>Studies small groups or individual cases.</p>	<p>Lacks scientific precision – unstructured approach.</p> <p>Lacks generalizability.</p> <p>Lacks transparency about the selection of respondents.</p> <p>Difficult to replicate. Thus reliability is low.</p> <p>Too subjective – researcher's integrity is an issue.</p>
<b>Quantitative</b>	<p>Quantitative research is homogeneous.</p> <p>Quantitative researchers rely on a positivist approach to knowledge.</p>	<p>Quantitative research adopts the scientific method.</p> <p>Research strategy is structured. Follows a predetermined procedure.</p>	<p>Quantitative research does not consider how situations impacted the participants. Thus analysis can produce shallow results.</p>

	<p>Quantitative research highlights the deductive approach – testing of theory.</p> <p>Quantitative research is referred to as a nomothetic approach.</p> <p>Analyses data in numerical form.</p>	<p>Consequently, context can be contrived.</p> <p>Study of theory and literature yield aims, objectives and hypotheses</p> <p>Concepts are presented in the form of variables.</p> <p>Researcher's stance is distant. Consequently researcher bias is reduced.</p> <p>Can be replicated, thus reliability is high.</p> <p>Has the advantage of wide coverage and generalizability.</p> <p>Provides snapshots – emphasises objective standards.</p>	<p>Collects data by administering research instruments or manipulating circumstances.</p> <p>Ignores people's interpretation of their environment.</p> <p>Probability of bias.</p>
<b>Mixed Methods</b>	<p>Researchers using the mixed methods style employ the combination of the qualitative and quantitative designs.</p> <p>Mixed model research can be: either employing the approaches independently; or applying a number of approaches sequentially or concurrently</p> <p>Mixed methods strategies:  sequential research (qualitative/ quantitative first); parallel or simultaneous research; equal status designs;</p>	<p>Extends the understanding of the data and findings.</p> <p>Using one design to clarify and expound the other design.</p> <p>Adds meaning to the study.</p> <p>Allows researchers to compare data for differences, convergence or some combination.</p> <p>Provides grounds for triangulation.</p>	<p>Offers challenges for the researcher because s/he has to collect wide-ranging data, and consequently examine both statistical and documented data.</p> <p>The researcher needs to be conversant with both research designs.</p> <p>At times it can be difficult to collect data over an extended time frame.</p> <p>The researcher has to indicate the kind of mixed methods strategies at the proposal stage.</p> <p>Mixed method style is rather complex – interchanging between</p>

	dominant-less dominant design; styles with multilevel use of approaches.		deductive and inductive approaches  Difficult to integrate qualitative and quantitative research designs because of their distinct epistemological assumptions.  A time-consuming process.
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Sources: Bryman (2004), Cohen, *et al.* (2003), Creswell (2009), Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Neuman (2003) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998).

#### 4.1.4 The Study Undertaken

##### 1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach and seeks to understand facts in specific settings. (Cohen, *et al.*, 2003; Filmer *et al.*, 1998 cited in Seale, 2000 and Patton, 2002). Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.17) define qualitative research as ‘any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.’

In my research, I wanted to explore the respondents’ perspectives on the primary and subsidiary questions (see Section 4.1). Consequently I chose the qualitative approach, which Burrell and Morgan (1979) called the idiographic approach since it facilitated in-depth understanding of single cases. I decided I could work with a design that allowed me to acquire an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the educators in the field, and create direct and personal contact with the respondents in their own environment. Patton (1987, p.16) stated that:

Qualitative approaches emphasize the importance of getting close to the people and situations being studied in order to understand personally the realities and minutiae of daily program life.

I could not claim to speak for the Maltese Educational stakeholders of the education reforms sanctioned by *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006). Thus it was not the purpose of this study to generalize from the collected data. Furthermore given my work schedule, the time frame to carry out the study, planning to work directly with the respondents, evaluating the above strengths and limitations of potential research designs (see Table 4.1), opting for convenience and purposive sampling of the identified four colleges, and discussing the matter with my supervisor, underlined the rationale as to why the decision was taken to go for a qualitative approach.

Consequently, in my enquiry I sought, not only to understand how the interviewees interpreted the newly established College network system but also to interpret the world that the interviewees presented. Accordingly, in interpreting the collected data, which ‘will be glossed with the meanings... of those people who are their source’ (Cohen, *et al.*, 2003, p.23), I followed the interpretative paradigm because ‘people’s words provided greater access to their subjective meaning’ (Lazar, 1998 cited in Seale, 2000, p.17). In addition, knowing that I was to conduct interviews and observations in the natural environment of the stakeholders (Neuman, 2003) I sought to employ a naturalistic strategy

(Filmer *et al.*, 1998 cited in Seale, 2000). I also utilised the situational ethnomethodology technique since I was concerned with understanding how the interviewees made sense of events in their daily work (Cohen, *et al.*, 2003).

## **4.2 The Research Design**

A research design presents the framework for undertaking a study, which can embrace all that is relevant in the gathering and analysis of the data. It provides the basic structure through which an investigation takes place. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.14) claimed that:

A research design situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives.

### **4.2.1 The Framework of the Study**

The study, which was divided into two phases commenced in October of 2006. Piloting as Bryman (2004) and Cohen *et al.* (2003) noted was an important stage as it helped the researchers to contextualise the instruments to be used within their setting.

In Phase One I piloted the interview research questions with one randomly selected college principal, and a randomly selected sample of both Heads of School and teachers chosen from three of the first four colleges set up in September 2005 (referred to as College Two, Three and Four respectively). The study in Phase One was conducted in College One.

In Phase Two I replicated the study of Phase One in three other Colleges, denoted as Colleges Five, Six and Seven, and revisited College One. Drawing on Bryman's (2004, p.52) claim that 'a longitudinal element occurs when a case that has been studied is returned to at a later stage', suggested that given that I revisited College One designated my research as having a longitudinal element.

### **4.2.2 Data Collection**

I collected qualitative data, between January 2007 and December 2010 by drawing on five different sources:

- face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews with key policy-makers, two of whom were among the principal architects of the Law *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006);
- face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews with the Permanent Secretaries for Education, the four College Principals and the Heads of all the Primary and Secondary schools of the four Colleges in the study;
- face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a sample of teachers from all the schools in the study;
- observations of CCoH meetings;

- official documents.

Considering these five different sources of data collection for the study I could say that they connected my research to the case study method, particularly given that Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.14) argued that ‘the case study method relies on interviewing, observing and document analysis.’ Additionally, Bassey (1999) referred to an educational case study as an empirical investigation of aspects concerned with an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system and conducted within a particular environment, mainly in its natural context. Also, the case study approach recognised the way people and the environment were interlinked (Bromley, 1986). Such literature underlined the objective of the research to understand the perceptions, opinions and attitudes of the interviewees towards the collaborative and collegial endeavour that had been proposed in *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) and endorsed by the amendment to the Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). Another objective of the research was to discover how the newly sanctioned intra- and inter-school joint working reform was impacting educational leadership and management, and the processes of governance and governing and accountability. I also used the case study to identify characteristics within and outside the system of the case.

Finally, the collection of a wide data set that I envisaged to collect, presented the opportunity to explore multiple realities and plural perspectives. I began by reviewing official, educational and legal documents. After the reviewing of documents I conducted the interviews. I wanted to explore the internal dynamics of the interviewees and begin to understand their narratives. I also wanted to see the impact that the reforms and changes would have upon the participants as social actors in a joint-working endeavour. Concurrent with the period during which the interviews were conducted, I also attended observation sessions of the CCoH meetings of the Colleges selected for the study. The claims that I made in this study were based on all the collected data.

#### ***4.2.3 The Two Phases of the Study***

The research design had two phases:

##### **Phase One – An analytical study of the primary and the three secondary themes of the study in College One**

Phase One entailed a case study of one of the four pilot network projects set up in 2005. I began the study by piloting the research interview questions. Both the members of the pilot group and the interviewees in College One shared similar characteristics with their counterparts in the four other colleges.

The feedback from the pilot study was used:

- to refine and finalize the data collecting instrument by identifying problems that were neither predicted nor noticed when designing the interview schedules (Appendix 3);
- to identify questions potentially ambiguous and unclear to the interviewees completing the pilot.

The pilot study results were also used to determine:

- that tape recording interviewees away from their colleagues, was rather beneficial, because it provided direct and personal contact with people in their own environment and setting, and created a more relaxed atmosphere;
- the appropriate mechanics of the administration of the interview programme;
- the time frames for the interviews;
- the quality of the introduction that helped me establish a rapport with the interviewee and foster a climate of trust;
- the sequence of the questions in the interview schedules;
- the incidence of leading questions and insensitive text.

Wanting to reinforce the suitability of my data collecting instrument I consulted some of my colleagues at the University of Malta for their expertise in the field of research methodologies. I discussed with them the research methodology, the semi-structured interview schedule and the procedures for data collection, particularly the logistics and mechanics of the interviews.

The analysis was based on one year of field work informed by a total of 54 face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews with policy-makers and educators (Tables 4.2 and 4.3), observation of CCoH meetings, and reviewing documentation – *The Act to Amend the Education Act Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) and the seminal document, *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005).

Finally, the Phase One research involved interviewees who worked in different sectors of Maltese Education (The Ministry, the Education Authorities and Schools). The interviews, which took place between January 2007 and January 2008, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

**Table 4.2:** Policy-makers Interviewed in Phase One

<i>Minister of Education, Youth and Employment (MEYE)</i>	<i>Permanent Secretary for (MEYE)</i>	<i>Director of the Policy Development and Programme Implementation (MEYE)</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>

**Table 4.3:** Interviewed Educators of College One

<i>College Co-ordinator</i>	<i>Heads of Secondary and Junior Lyceum (J.L.) Schools</i>	<i>Heads &amp; Acting Heads of Primary Schools</i>	<i>Acting Heads of Music &amp; Drama Schools</i>	<i>Teachers in Secondary &amp; Junior Lyceum Schools</i>	<i>Teachers in Primary Schools</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>28</i>

Note: In Table 4.3 I referred to the Head of College One as the College Co-ordinator (term used up to 2007). In 2008 all the College Co-ordinators were called College Principals; a title introduced through the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006)

## **Phase Two - An analytical study of the primary and the three secondary themes of the study across three other Colleges and revisiting College One.**

In Phase Two I conducted multi-site case studies similar to those of Phase One in three other State-maintained Colleges and also revisited College One. The data collection for Phase Two was carried out between February 2009 and December 2010. Interviewing followed the same pattern that I used in Phase One. I also undertook a cross case analysis of all four cases. The convenience and purposive sampling of the interviewees of the three regional Colleges for Phase Two was guided by the:

- variety in setting, size and geographical location (see Figure 3);
- good working relationships with the respective Principals and Heads of School.

To enable a cross-case analysis I followed the same interview procedure and selection strategy of interviewees as those applied in Phase One. I also revisited College One to analyse the nature of any changes in perceptions and consequently their opinions and attitudes towards the College Reform since the data collection undertaken in Phase One. Revisiting College One turned out to be important given that a number of changes had taken place since 2008, mainly that:

- new Heads of School had been appointed;
- new teachers had been engaged;
- a number of statutory College structures had been introduced and new College personnel had been appointed;
- certain sectors (for example the restructuring of the Education Division) had undergone changes.

Phase Two provided data from a total of 142 face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews with policy-makers and educators (Tables 4.4 and 4.5), and observations of CCoH meetings. This design helped me appreciate the fluidity in which this research had been undertaken and the probability that the inability to understand fully the contextual variables that could impinge on the operations of the reform.

**Table 4.4: Policy-makers Interviewed in Phase Two**

<i>Minister of Education, Employment and the Family (MEEF)</i>	<i>Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family (MEEF)</i>	<i>Director General for Directorate for Educational Services</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>



**Table 4.5:** Interviewed Educators of Colleges One, Five, Six and Seven in Phase Two

College Principals	Heads of combined Secondary and J.L. schools	Heads of J.L. schools	Heads of Secondary schools	Heads & Acting Heads of Primary schools	Teachers in Secondary & J.L. schools	Teachers in Primary schools
4	3	5	4	28	30	65

### 4.3 Research Context

#### 4.3.1 Overall Picture

I chose to conduct my interviews with Policy-makers, College Principals, Heads of School and teachers because I felt that they could provide the information that I was seeking, since they were directly involved in the implementation, operations and sustainability of the reforms. Consequently, I employed what (Bryman, 2004; Cohen *et al.*, 2003 and Neuman, 2003) denoted as purposive sampling.

The 37 schools making up the three different levels and spread across the four regional colleges selected for the study are presented in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6:** The Number of Schools across the Four Colleges participating in the Study

Kindergarten Centres <sup>1</sup> (Pupils' ages: three to six years)	Primary Schools (Pupils' ages: six to 11 years)	Junior Lyceum Schools		Junior Lyceum & Secondary Schools accommodated in the same building		Secondary Schools (locally known as Area Secondary Schools)	
		Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
28	28	3	1	1	3	2	2

1. Every Primary School housed a Kindergarten Centre.

When in December 2010 I took stock of the physical school buildings of the secondary schools of the four Colleges, I noticed that not all the colleges had the full complement of secondary schools as proposed in the College Model (Appendix One). During the course of the study the building of new schools and renovating existing ones was on-going. It was envisaged that the building programme of the full complement of the proposed College Model for Secondary schools would be completed by 2015. As a result, Secondary level students were attending schools that were not in their designated College area.

#### 4.3.2 Context for Phase One Interviews

The four pilot network projects launched in 2005 and later called Colleges, were: St. Benedict's, The Cottonera Schools' Network, the Gozo Schools' Network and the Network of Schools for Children

with Special Needs (the latter network of schools grouped the four Special Schools that catered for children with 'Special Needs' in the Maltese Islands at the time).

The cluster of state schools integrated in College One at the time of the study was: 11 Primary schools, which also provided space for Kindergarten classes, two sets of single sex schools (One girls' secondary school and one girls' 'grammar' school-type Junior Lyceum. The same setup was provided for the boys). Every set of single sex schools were accommodated in the same building and under the leadership of the same Head of school. Teaching, for the different levels was provided by the same professionals.

#### ***4.3.3 Context for Phase Two Interviews***

The identified Colleges that participated in the Phase Two stage of the research had more or less similar characteristics to those of College One, and by the end of 2010 three of the participating Colleges had in place the College Model for Secondary School (see Appendix One) together with 'grammar type' known locally as Junior Lyceums. Thus the colleges had the current model as presented in Appendix Two. In future all Colleges were to have only one Secondary Boys' school and one Secondary Girls' school (see Appendix One). This meant that the current 'grammar type' schools (known locally as Junior Lyceums) would be phased out.

I also observed that, between one phase and another, the Secondary schools' population of the four colleges did not change dramatically, unlike that in the Primary Schools where the change had been rather pronounced. The small Primary schools had one class for each year, while the larger Primary schools had two to three classes for the same year. A few primary schools had a school population of less than 100 pupils.

#### **4.4 Ontological – Human Nature Considerations**

Burrell and Morgan (1979) presented four basic philosophical assumptions that social scientists used to approach research. They presented interesting insights that were particularly relevant to this study. It was not easy for me to extrapolate what was subjective and/or objective to my understanding of the responses given. The need to extract meaning from feedback and to justify the reasons for giving a specific response and not another is, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979), an important one. However, this was far from an easy endeavour.

One of the critical issues that a researcher faced was whether the issues raised by respondents were a result of their personal way of engaging with external 'reality' – therefore personally construed; or whether they were the product of their engagement with the realities they were facing. Therefore, the realities could be self-created rather than real. People, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979), developed their own way of handling the challenges they faced. In fact, as the interviews unfolded it became evident that a substantial number of educators held different and differing views about the unfolding reforms.

It may be argued that reforms are aimed at challenging and empowering one and all, that reform per se can be a daunting task at both the personal and the collective levels since it challenges people's mind-set, their theories and practices. Consequently, many of the interviewed educators showed that they were cognisant of the challenges that they would have to face in changing the set ways they had been working with.

As I listened to the interviewees' accounts I appreciated more the complex nature of the human dynamics and the respondents' relationship with the unfolding scenario that moulded their environment. Such impact of the environment on the respondents resonated with the philosophical assumption, which according to Burrell and Morgan (1979) concerns human nature, and which they referred to as 'a determinist view' (p.6). I became aware of the central issue that centred round the communicative and informative factors. Many of the respondents questioned the course of action taken by the Central Authorities in preparing and informing educators, parents and the community for the challenges that the ground-breaking reforms and the radical revamp of Maltese Education would bring on. They appeared to be very cynical about the degree of endorsement the reforms would receive from school practitioners. Such scepticism among a substantial group of interviewees, particularly teachers, exposed their varied opinions about the on-going innovative changes and policies in the education sector.

Furthermore, as I reflected on the interviewees' discourse, I was faced with a basic ontological dilemma akin to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) claim that social scientists face when conducting their research; that is: '...whether 'reality' was given 'out there' in the world, or the product of one's mind' (p.1). As I went through the transcripts I wondered whether my respondents' reactions to the reform, as expressed in their narratives, were the result of their own perception of things, for as Cohen *et al.* (2003, p.267) observed:

Interviews enable the participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view.

I also pondered on the idea as to whether they were provoked by the 'reality' of the conflicting scenario that was unfolding as a result of the divergent stance taken by stakeholders, academics and the Malta Union of Teachers; or a combination of both.

Regardless of the ontological issue, I grew aware that the apprehension that many of the respondents were demonstrating was very real for them and that this appeared to be the result of the relationship between their human nature and their environment. It pointed towards the respondents' subjective experience of collaboration in a real context of 'external' condition legally imposed.

#### **4.5 Selecting the Sample for the Study**

When selecting the four colleges for the study, I employed the convenience and purposive sampling methods, acknowledged as forms of sampling that fall under the umbrella term non-probability sampling (Bryman, 2004; Cohen and Manion, 1997; Cohen *et al.*, 2003 and Neuman, 2003), because I considered them the most appropriate. Using the non-probability sampling technique implied that from the overall population of potential participants involved in the study only some existing respondents were more likely to be selected than others (Bryman, 2004), suggesting that the researcher could not generalise about the population (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). However, it could be argued that purposive sampling allowed themes in the full breadth of the experience of respondents in various sites to be pursued, explored and characterised, which in a way gave a sense of generalizability. What could be said was that information collected from a non-probability sample could not be used to make inferences to the population from which the sample was selected (Bryman, 2004).

The cohort of colleges for the research was selected using the convenience and purposive sampling methods. The convenience sampling method was employed because of the availability of

the selected colleges (Cohen *et al.*, 2003) since I had a good working relationship with the respective Principals and with many of the Heads of School, which helped to facilitate access. The selection of the four Colleges for the study was also shaped by region and population size. In choosing the diverse groups of interviewees (policy-makers, college principals, Heads of School and teachers) I employed the purposive sampling process because I wanted to interview those policy-makers and educators whom I felt were relevant to my research questions. Bryman (2004, p.333) claimed that ‘(m)ost writers on sampling in qualitative research based on interviews recommend that purposive sampling is conducted.’

Although the study employed convenience and purposive sampling, which could create a possible degree of bias, the chosen colleges offered a good quality sample that provided data robust enough to offer in-depth answers for the research questions of the study because:

- of the regional locality of the selected colleges that were well distributed across the Maltese Islands;
- every college has the same hierarchical administrative and managerial structure;
- each College incorporated a number of Primary schools and two Secondary schools that were catering for all the children within its designated region;
- every College was to provide an array of co-ordinated educational facilities, resources and support services. The Act stated that Colleges will have the ‘...effective services of counsellors, social workers, psychologists and other professional persons according to the needs of the students and their families;’ (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.633).

Relevant information about the Principals of the Colleges in the study is presented in Table 4.7. Noticeable was the gender ratio of 3:1, which reflected the gender ratio of College Principals of all the State maintained Colleges. The four College Principals demonstrated vast years of leadership experience at different levels of education. Such experience, which varied from that of an Assistant Director to a Primary Head of School ranged from two to five years. There were Principals who had been in place since 2005 and others who had been appointed in 2007 and 2008.

**Table 4.7:** College Principals in Phase One and Two of the Study

Gender		Year of inception as College Principal		Status held prior to that of College Principal			
Male	Female	2005	2008	Assistant Director	Heads of School		Assistant Head of School
					Primary	Secondary	
3	1	1	3	1	1	1	1

The gender ratio of 3:1 of the interviewed Heads of School reflected that of the Principals presented in Table 4.7. Their school leadership experience ranged from two months to 12 years. The majority held a Diploma in Educational Administration and Management (a requisite for the post of a Head of School after 1995), some also held a second degree and a few were reading for it. One had a PhD and a few were reading for their doctorate. All interviewed Heads had been seasoned teachers

who had taught in either the Primary or Secondary sectors, or in both. Their teaching experience ranged from 12 to 20 years. All the interviewed Heads of School had moved up the hierarchical structure through the traditional Civil Service model based on seniority; that is, from teachers to Assistant Heads/Heads of Department and then to Heads of School.

It is worth noting that when I revisited College One, between 2009 and 2010, the Phase One cohort of interviewed Heads had undergone some changes. Five new Heads of School had been appointed. They replaced four Heads who had reached retirement age, and one who had been serving as an Acting Head. Two of the newly appointed Heads had previously held the post of Acting Heads School. Furthermore, during the gathering of the Phase Two interview data, a few of the interviewed school leaders were serving as acting Heads of School.

The teacher participants were also selected using the convenience and purposive sampling methods. For practical considerations the criteria adopted for the selection of the sample of interviewed teachers was shaped by gender and teaching experience factors. I wanted a gender balanced cohort and a varied sample of novice and seasoned teachers, since both factors could provide a robust and distinct corpus of data. With the help of the schools' list of teachers and other information, readily provided by the respective Heads of School, I identified each college cohort of teacher interviewees using the above-mentioned criteria. Consequently, the range of professional experience of interviewed teachers ranged from two to 40 years and their professional qualifications ranged from a Teacher's Training College Certificate to a second degree.

#### **4.6. Ethical Considerations**

Research demanded not only expertise, diligence and objectivity as it sought to enhance the corpus of knowledge (Bassey, 1999) but also honesty, integrity, confidentiality and anonymity, especially when the study involved human beings. I understood that I needed to anticipate and address any ethical dilemmas that could arise. All this underlined my ethical responsibilities as a researcher. Lankshear, C. and Knobel, M. (2004, p.101) claimed that:

within educational research, ethics is concerned with ensuring that the interests and well-being of people are not harmed as a result of the research being done.

I was aware that ethical responsibility and practice entailed more than just adhering to established guidelines and statutory provisions. Given that this research was aimed at exploring the interviewees' perceptions about the reforms that had been introduced since 2006, meant that the study engaged people in a direct way. Moreover, acknowledging that some of what was recorded could be private, called for the implementation of ethical considerations.

Mindful that gaining access and acceptance generated ethical implications about openness, mutual trust and commitment, I sought to build a meaningful, strong rapport with the participants. I maintained that trust throughout the research and beyond by disguising the identities of the interviewees, the schools and colleges participating in my study. Sustaining such trust could reduce possibilities of uncomfortableness, apprehension, suspicion and concern when I posed the questions to the interviewee.

Primarily I ensured that before I started the interviews the participants knew their rights particularly that they had the right to withdraw from the research without offering a reason. Furthermore, at the beginning of the interview, all interviewees were asked whether they objected to the recording of their interview. The participants were also informed as to the manner in which their recorded narratives would be used in the research that I was conducting for the thesis submitted for my degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at the University of Bath. They were also told that the copyright was mine and material could be copied as allowed by law or with my consent. I also said that the thesis might be available within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purpose of consultation. The interviewees were informed about the purposes of the research, why their participation was important, how their narratives would be used, to whom the collected data would be presented and the probable length of the interview.

Aware of the sensitivity of the accumulated interview data, the purpose of confidentiality and safeguarding the anonymity of the interviewee could be crucial to the study. Acknowledging that the promise of confidentiality and anonymity could encourage the interviewees to share their opinions, attitudes and perceptions more openly, I strove to respect the privacy and dignity of the participants. Thus, I sought to achieve a sense of trust with the interviewees, particularly with the cohort of educators by guaranteeing the participants' anonymity. Consequently, I promised the participants that their identity would be concealed, particularly in the analytical stage of the study.

I informed the participants that I would give them a copy of the interview transcript for confirmation to ensure that what I had written was a faithful rendering of their narratives. I also informed the Heads, before the observation sessions, that I would hand over to the Principal a typed copy of the field notes for verification, clarification if needed, and approval. Besides wanting to employ the member check strategy (Lincoln, 1995), which reinforced validity, I wanted to anticipate any residue of ambiguity that could be the consequence of any form of misunderstandings or misinterpretations between what was recorded or observed, and the written text. I also promised that all the data will be destroyed after two years after submission of the thesis. I thought that this would enhance the level of trust and honesty between me and the participants.

Fully conscious of the implications of my ethical responsibilities as a researcher, I followed both the canons of good research practice (Bryman, 2004) and certain established ethical protocols. I conducted the study within the parameters of:

- the ethical guidelines issued by the Social Science Research Ethics Committee (SSREC) of the Department of Education Studies within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Bath (University of Bath, 2012);
- the ethical guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), (BERA, 2012);
- *Data Protection Act (Act XXVI of 2001, as amended by Act XXXI of 2002)*. Chapter 440 of the Laws of Malta (Laws of Malta, 2002).

These guidelines helped me to:

- abide by ethical principles and criteria demanded in research;

- follow ethical procedures in this research;
- adhere to ethically acceptable practice;
- safeguard informed consent;
- protect the interviewees from harm and safeguard their privacy.

Finally, to ensure that the language of the interview questions adhered to the ethical guidelines of SSREC (University of Bath, 2012) and BERA (BERA, 2012) and that it followed standard ethical procedures, I asked University of Malta colleagues to review and assess the interview schedule on the basis of the above mentioned ethical guidelines.

## **4.7 Validity, Reliability and Triangulation**

In this section I discuss the concepts of validity, reliability and triangulation in qualitative, interpretative and naturalistic research, which are important keys in authenticating the trustworthiness of the data of my study and presenting effective research. Neuman (2003, p.184) claims that:

(a)ll social researchers want their measures to be reliable and valid. Both ideas are important in establishing the truthfulness, credibility, or believability of findings.

Furthermore, triangulation adds conviction to the findings and enhances the validity of the findings (Bryman, 2004).

The concepts of validity and reliability for research in the social sciences, particularly in education, have been widely discussed in literature (Aspinwall *et al.*, 1994; Bassey, 1999; Cohen and Manion, 1997; Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Additionally, while literature (Bryman, 2001; Bush, 2002 and Cohen *et al.*, 2003) acknowledges the complexity around validity and reliability, whereas (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) went a step further considering them important criteria for quality and for establishing rigour in scientific research. Consequently, according to Patton (2002), qualitative researchers need to address when planning and assessing the quality of a study. However, validity and reliability in research have also been at the centre of controversy and the tension between these two concepts is noted in literature (Agar, 1986; Hammersley, 1992 and Silverman, 1993).

### **4.7.1 Validity**

Bell's (1987, p.51) definition of validity that '(v)alidity... tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe' encapsulates one of the central characteristics of the concept of validity. Thus validity is a verification of the accuracy of the data and consequently the findings.

Bryman, (2001) and Cohen *et al.*, (2003) write about different types of validity, such as internal and external validity. As a primary stance for my qualitative research I consider internal validity and pay attention to the issue of credibility (Hammersley, 1992). When discussing the concept of credibility in naturalistic research, Lincoln (1995) argues for six ways that can address

naturalistic inquiry; four of which are relevant to the study, namely triangulation, member check, audit trail and prolonged engagement.

During the interviews and observation sessions I also paid attention to the interviewee's verbal comments, their non-verbal reactions and subjective expressions. I tried to identify the extent that the data could be supported by other interviewees' recorded experiences. Consequently, I could appreciate, although in a limited way, the complexity of what the interviewees were experiencing.

However, I acknowledge that it is not going to be an easy task to recognise the extent to which there may be a difference between the 'espoused and enacted responses' of the interviewees. I hoped that by comparing the interviewee's discourse with that of his/her interviewed counterparts in tandem with the triangulation model (having different data collection methods) I could obtain better understanding of the interviewees' perceptions about the reforms, and the intra-and inter-school joint working endeavour of Maltese educators and schools.

### *1. Trustworthiness concept*

A second position for naturalistic researchers to explore the concept of validity as confirmation of rigour in qualitative research are addressed and established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), whose research prompts the on-going debate on rigour (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have also introduced ideas around the concept of trustworthiness, which offer new ways of expressing validity and reliability in qualitative research (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Lincoln and Guba, (1985) refine their criterion of trustworthiness when they introduce four criteria: credibility (parallels internal validity in quantitative research); dependability (similar to reliability in quantitative research); transferability (equivalent to external validity in quantitative research) and confirmability (corresponds to objectivity in quantitative research) (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Trustworthiness, which is addressed by researchers (Bryman, 2004; Bush, 2002 and Rolfe, 2006) is defined by Bryman (2001, p.545) as '(a) set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research.' Furthermore, the wide-ranging debate around the concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research, which is replacing conservative views of reliability and validity (Cohen *et al.*, 2003) suggests that trustworthiness has become both a predominant term and controversy in research.

The criteria of credibility, among other strategies, entails submitting the findings to the participants (Rolfe, 2006; Tobin and Begley, 2004), which Bryman (2004, p.275) maintained 'is often referred to as *respondent validation or member validation*.' Bryman (2004) added that presenting the findings to the interviewees could help to establish corroboration between the written account and perceptions of the participants. In this regard, I submitted to every participant the transcript of his/her interview and a copy of the findings' chapter. Lincoln (1995) claimed that member checks and audit trails, among other strategies, helped to establish credibility.

The trustworthiness criterion of dependability is considered 'a parallel to reliability in quantitative research' (Bryman, 2004, p.275), which I achieved by presenting an audit trail demonstrating that the study was carried out rigorously (Carcary, 2009). Presenting an audit trail of the study (see Appendix 4) meant displaying a clearly documented research process (Schwandt, 2001). I developed an audit trail by logging the research activities, keeping a research journal, and documenting the data collection procedures (Creswell and Miller, 2000).



Transferability, which referred to generalizability (Tobin and Begley, 2004) does not apply to this research, since in a naturalistic qualitative research transferability is central to case-to-case study (Tobin and Begley, 2004), which is not the case in this research.

Finally, according to Tobin and Begley (2004), the concept of confirmability is concerned with establishing that the data and discussion of the findings are based on an empirical and scientific process and not invented by the researcher. Confirmability in this study was addressed by having a competent academic (a practicing professional in the field of qualitative research) audit my research methodology (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). After I had collected the data for each phase and wrote the bulk of the findings and discussion sections, my auditor systematically and rigorously examined my audit trail, the reviews of the official documents, the field notes of the observation sessions and comments from the member checking.

#### **4.7.2 Reliability**

Literature, (Bryman, 2004; Bush, 2002; Cohen and Manion, 1997; Cohen *et al.*, 2003 and Creswell, 2007) contends that reliability, in the field of research is synonymous with consistency. Bell (1987, pp.50-51) corroborates this and defines reliability as ‘the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions.’ Thus one can say that establishing the reliability of a research project will be a confirmation of a good quality study, regardless of whether the researcher employs the quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. Bush (2002, p.61) claims that ‘(t)he concept of reliability can be applied to several different research methods.’

Although, reliability is said to be used in all kinds of studies, very often, it is associated with quantitative studies because they ‘were originally developed for use in positivist or quantitative research’ (Bush, 2002, p.59). Ultimately, reliability, like validity, is a key factor that shows a good quality study and every researcher needs to address it at the planning stage of the study (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduce the term ‘dependability’ (p.300) in qualitative research, which Bryman, (2004) maintains that dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative research. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) add that ‘inquiry audit’ (p.317) can be considered as one of the measures that can enrich qualitative research.

Seale (1999) associates the concept of reliability in qualitative research with the criterion of trustworthiness when claiming that ‘trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability’ (p.266). Consequently, when abstracting the concept of reliability one can say that in qualitative research there is similarity between validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.316) argues that:

(s)ince there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability].

#### **4.7.3 Triangulation**

Cohen *et al.* (2003, p.112) state: ‘Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour’, which according to Bryman (2004) adds conviction to the findings because the use of more than one source of data can enhance the validity of the findings.

Triangulation, which can add to the validity of the study, has also found itself at the centre of controversy. Triangulation, which has been recognised as a means of cross-checking data to establish the validity of that data (Bush, 2002), has also had ‘its critics’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2003, p.115). Actually, literature, (Denzin, 1997; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980 and Silverman, 1985) has shown that triangulation has been a significant area of debate.

Bush (2002) in discussing the notion of triangulation refers to methodological and respondent triangulation. He argues that while methodological triangulation means ‘using several methods to explore the same issue’ (p.68), respondent triangulation means ‘asking the same questions of many different participants’ (p.68). Considering the data collection process of my study both the methodological triangulation (reviewed official documents, observed CCoH meetings and face-to-face individual interviews) and the respondent triangulation (same questions were asked to different interviewees) are employed. I can say that triangulation shows confidence around the issue of validity and reliability to my study.

## **4.8 Data Collection**

### **4.8.1 The Interviews**

Interviews are deemed to be a robust method to collect data and help the researcher understand people’s perceptions, attitudes and opinions, and interpretations of events and construction of reality (Punch, 2005). Interviews are a powerful method to help educational researchers ‘gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individual’ (Seidman, 1991, p.7). Furthermore, interviews not only play ‘major roles in the response rate that is achieved’ (Fowler, 1989, p.107), but also present the narrative realities and perspectives of the interviewees (Bryman, 2004). Ribbins (2007) argues that interviewing is the most fruitful tool for data collection. He adds that they are considered to be related to naturalness and spontaneity, flexibility and control of the environment; characteristics that I observed first-hand during the interviews. Finally, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) claim that interviewing generates empirical data by encouraging respondents to talk, consequently suggesting that interviews can be considered forms of conversations that address questions linked to the research. They add that during the interview, both the interviewer and interviewee are in some way interacting. Consequently, the interview is a shared experience and both interviewer and interviewee become active participants, which can give rise to potential bias.

Cohen *et al.* (2003) claim that ‘(i)n qualitative data the subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives together contribute to a degree of bias’ (p.105). I acknowledge that since the human factor is central to research interview (a conversation between two persons), it can create bias. Thus, I realise that the interview data can be overshadowed by a degree of bias, particularly taking into account the concerns of the participant and the context of the research. Having interviewees with their respective ‘experiential and biographical baggage’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2003, p.121) coupled with the chance of interviewer influence (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989) can impact the interview data. The probable consequence is that the interview data can be encumbered with the articulated personal experience of the world in which the interviewees live and work.

### **4.8.2 Individual Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interviews**

Bryman (2004) argues that semi-structured interviews permit flexibility and is gaining the name of in-depth or qualitative interview. I opted for the semi-structured interview because it enabled ‘respondents to project their own ways of defining the world’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2003, pp.146-147). I wanted to be able to guide the interviewee in the direction of the research questions and at the same

time gave me the freedom to explore further some issues that could arise from the discourse. I believe that this type of interview can help me probe the unknown.

Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews (apart from observations and reviewing official documents) were the means of gathering the data for the study. Interviews were tape recorded. Tape recording has the benefit of making the narratives of the interviewees less impermanent (Denscombe, 2007) and facilitating transcription of interviews. Furthermore, transcribing interviews reduces any possible conditioning by my preconceptions and makes possible interviewee validation and confirmation of the interview data. However, recording interviews has its risks, challenges and problems – such as, the tape recorder malfunctioning and interviewees refusing to be recorded (Bryman, 2004).

The interviewees provided an interesting and versatile combination given that the cohort embraces academics and non-academics, veteran and novice educators, supporters, sceptics, critics and anti-reformists. They also provided significant biographical and professional information. The interviews, on the other hand, offered rich detailed data about the operations of the reform, related issues and challenges because the narrative of the cohort ‘... is the reality’ (Cuff *et al.*, 1990, p.185). However, I acknowledged that the data, which provided me with the narratives of the interviewees’ outlook on the reform and experiences, and which gave me an in-depth insight into the development of joint-working in local State-maintained Colleges, can very well change over time. Such a change can develop because at the time of collecting, analysing and reporting data, the implementation of reforms was on going, which, in itself, created one of the limitations of the study since interviewees could only relate to their current experience of the reform as it was unfolding rather than the reform in its entirety. However, since the collection of the data spread over four years, (2007-2010) I believed that I could still possibly gain an in-depth understanding of the research objectives that could help me report the perspectives of the participants.

### *1. Interviews’ timetable*

The individual interviews with the Policy-makers and the Permanent Secretaries were always held in the evening, because of their official and national commitments. The Phase Two interviews with the Permanent Secretary were conducted over three one hour sessions. That of the interviewed College Principals and school leaders was also arranged with very little difficulty because the leaders offered to work, where possible, around my timetable. Consequently the Principal’s recorded interviews were collected over a span of four Mondays. The teachers’ interviews were designed in collaboration with the respective school leaders. Although I had the full cooperation and support of the Principals and Heads of School, the time during which I collected the interview data was between mid-October and end of May. Naturally, no interviews could be organized during the various school breaks and holidays.

When interviewing the Heads of School and the teachers a different approach was adopted because of a larger cohort. I decided to group the schools in clusters so as to minimise the travel time from one school to the other. The grouping was based on the geographical proximity of the schools. Appointments for the interviews were arranged with the respective Heads of School two weeks prior to the interviews. All the Heads of School showed great support for my research by again working round my timetable and arranged to have the interviewed teachers available either on a Monday morning or Wednesday any time of the day until 2.00.p.m. While interviews with the Heads and teachers of Secondary Schools were held on a Monday, interviews with Heads and teachers of Primary Schools were held every Wednesday. Having pre-set days for the teachers’ interviews allowed the Heads of School to make the necessary preparations to have the interviewed teachers available, even

though, at times, certain difficulty arose in the case of Primary School teachers because of their class contact. In some cases the Heads of School or their Assistant Heads, replaced the interviewed teacher, thus facilitating the interview. All interviews were held as planned and ran smoothly. All the interviewees spoke freely, were cooperative and supportive.

## *2. Interviews' setting*

The interviews for Phase One and Two were conducted within a time frame established by the interviewees and the researcher. Furthermore, interviews were conducted in English, and were held at the interviewees' place of work. While the interviews with policy-makers and college principals were conducted in their offices, the interviews with the Heads of School were conducted away from their office, avoiding all forms of interruptions. We only had interruptions on two occasions and so changes to the planned researcher's schedule were minimal. Interviews with teachers were conducted in a room provided by the Heads of School. However, the occasional sound of a ringing bell and the students shouting during the break could not be curtailed.

## *3. Procedure*

Having identified the setting and the population for the study, I understood that gaining access to the colleges and their schools and securing the cooperation of the whole sample of interviewees, particularly the relevant gatekeepers in this study (College Principals and the Heads of School), was crucial. Bryman (2001, p.295) underlined the significance of obtaining access from the leaders of the organization when he argued that:

Even though you may secure a certain level of agreement lower down the hierarchy, you will usually need clearance from them. Such senior people act as gatekeepers.

I secured introductory meetings with the Principals and Heads of School where I discussed the research and presented them with the aim and objectives of my study, how participants would be involved, how issues of confidentiality and anonymity would be safeguarded, and promised them a copy of their interview transcript and a draft of the 'Findings' chapter for any comments on the faithfulness of their interview and data from observational notes. Having known the majority of the 'gatekeepers' (Bryman, 2001) as past working colleagues, helped to establish a good rapport and also facilitated accessibility. The four Principals also gave me access to observe CCoH meetings, and on every first observation session, prior to the commencing of the Council session, I introduced myself and the study. I also informed them that I would be attending a number of CCoH meetings as a research observer, for which I would give prior notice. All the interviewed Principals and Heads of School, save one Head of a Primary School, consented to the recording of their interview. In the latter case detailed notes were taken.

Finally, to maximise the research response of the sample of teachers, I asked the Heads of every school involved in the research to organise a short meeting with the cohort of selected teachers from their school. The purpose of the meetings was to explain the objective and background of the study, to inform the individual respondents that they had a personal choice (even though they were chosen) about whether or not they still wanted to participate, to answer any queries or apprehensions, and to assure them of anonymity and confidentiality. This approach was aimed at gaining the interviewees' support and trust.

#### *4. Structure of interview schedule*

The naturalistic approach allowed me an element of freedom to edit the questions, revise their sequence, explain them or add to them. I tried, as far as possible, to take a subordinate role so that the information obtained would be the end result of a non-manipulated design. In the study the interview questions were structured in a way that motivated the respondent to give honest answers. The questioning was not too loaded so as not to encourage the respondent to adopt avoidance tactics. Questions were structured in a clear and open-ended manner corroborating Cohen and Manion (1997, p.277) who argued that:

... open-ended items supply a frame of reference for respondents' answers, but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression.

Care was taken to ensure that the interview questions presented the research programme as an eclectic study. Consequently, the research incorporated methods, procedures and values (Popkewitz, 1984) that emerged from the intellectual traditions, namely empirical-analytic, symbolic enquiry and critical sciences. This said I strove to make an analytical critique of the issues that were emerging as Malta adopted the new education system without making value judgements.

Finally, taking into account the degree to which a researcher's findings may be biased, I understand that bias has to be addressed and where possible controlled, otherwise objectivity can be compromised. Such concerns were mitigated by attending carefully to wording interview questions that made interviewees feel unperturbed and to speak liberally about their world and their experiences. In this regard, further insight was required in the formatting of the various interview questions so as not to influence in any way the respondents' discourse in the light of potentially sensitive and personal opinions and attitude towards the reforms. To achieve this I reflected on whether:

- the involvement of the interviewees in the research would affect them negatively;
- the findings of the research would have an indirect impact on others.

Concerns about bias also offer a challenge for the evaluation process; recognizing both the quality and usefulness of the findings emerging from the data. I also tried to be cautious so as to minimise, as much as possible, interviewer's bias during the interview because the interpersonal nature of interviews could serve as a platform for interviewer's bias (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989).

The wide-ranging questions asked during the interviews addressed the four key themes of the research questions (see Appendix Three).

#### **4.8.3 Observation Sessions**

The process of the observation sessions allows me to gather data from real life situations and to explore what is going on *in situ*. Observation offers me the opportunity to verify and confirm the issues raised by the interviewees (HoS, and College Principals) during the respective interview. Observations give me the opportunity to gather data on the four settings (physical, human, interactional and programme) that Morrison (1993) identified.

Observation sessions were the second tool employed in the triangulation approach for the data collection of this study, particularly when triangulation was said to reinforce a study because it

combined methods (Patton, 2002). Moyles (2002), in her chapter entitled '*(o)bservation as a research tool*' (p.172) claims that observation could be a powerful and flexible tool for the researcher because, as suggested by Cohen and Manion (1997), observations could help the researcher to investigate at a deeper level.

Several observation sessions of the monthly CCoH meetings [three visits in Phase One and 12 visits in Phase Two] were carried out. I attended these sessions in the capacity of non-participant observer, during which I could observe directly the Principals and Heads of School in a different working environment and playing another role; that is, forming part of a collaborative team that worked collegially for the well-being of their college. I did not feel that the apprehension, which the participants or at least some of them may feel at being observed, would be an issue because I had already been involved with all the participants through the interviews I had previously conducted. They felt at ease in my presence and found no difficulty in having me as a non-participant observer during these meetings.

I wanted to observe and construct meaning based on the unfolding of events during CCoH meetings (a collaborative innovation for Maltese Education) and not reproduce a description of events. I sought to interpret what I observed in the light of the interview data. I acknowledge the criticality of remaining as objective as possible but am also aware of the difficulty to avoid observer bias. I merely observed, avoided eye contact and took notes without participating in the meeting. I felt that this strategy would be useful in order to collect evidence that would complement the interviews' data and the information that emerged from the review of official documents. Playing the role of a non-participant observer I aimed, to a certain extent, to remain 'invisible'. The role of the non-participant observer proved useful in exploring topics and themes that could prove uncomfortable for the interviewees to state.

Moyles (2002), when discussing the non-participant role of the observer states that '(n)on-participants usually enter the 'scene' of the research with knowledge of what they want to observe' (p.177). Consequently, as a non-participant I tried to disregard unwanted material that was unrelated to the research, and took notes of what was relevant to the study based on the key themes of the four research questions of the study. I documented information on the physical settings of the meetings since '(o)bservational data should always be contextualised' (Moyles, 2002, p.180). I paid attention to how the members interacted, how the meetings developed, the topics that were discussed, as well as the reaction of participants to the unfolding events during the meetings. I recorded information as it occurred.

To record the information I collected during the observation sessions I entered descriptive notes (description of the setting, information about participants together with accounts about references to events or activities) and reflective notes (my personal thoughts, perceptions, ideas and opinions). I also noted demographic information (the time and place where the observation took place).

The themes around the interview questions schedule were used as guidelines for the data that I noted down. Observation sessions of the CCoH meetings (the fora where Heads of School discussed the way forward for their College and the implementation of policies and reforms as directed by the Central Authorities) gave me supplementary information about the process of collaboration among Heads of School. I had first-hand accounts of joint-working among Heads, hence the fostering and development of intra-Council of Heads' collaboration. Such collaborative practice during CCoH

meetings also signified that inter-school collaboration was being established and maintained since Heads of different schools were working as one team.

#### **4.8.4 Official Documents**

The present day paradigm of networking, especially in education, can be considered as the most important organisational form of contemporary life, since networks are all about efforts of people coming together, collaborating, identifying issues, improving existing practices and stimulating a culture of sharing to strengthen the teaching and learning process (MEYE, 2005). The official documents: the seminal document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005), and the Law, *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) were reviewed because they both underline the paradigms of networking and collaboration. These documents have some innovative proposals that are crucial for the transformation of the Maltese Education System:

- decentralization in the educational system so that decisions are taken at school level and action became more effective;
- intra- and inter-school collaboration and collegial relationships.

The seminal document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) is divided into five chapters and presents a number of reforms and factors within school networks together with a restructured education authority. It introduces the education reform proposals, which indicate that the proposed changes and reforms are meant to overhaul the Maltese Education System. Networking is identified as a system that will facilitate horizontal and vertical linkages between schools from early childhood to the end of compulsory school age (three to 16 years). Joint-working was basically the concept behind the College Reform in Malta. Predetermined childcare centres, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools will be tied and woven horizontally and also vertically, with the coordination of the heads led by the Principal, under the direction of the Directorates, which in turn are guided by the Permanent Committee for Education chaired by the Minister for Education (MEYE, 2005). I read the vision of the networking document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) as an emancipatory one, and looked upon the aims of this document as liberating, showing a move towards greater decentralisation to the school site. However, despite the constructive and innovative changes that this seminal document proposes for the Maltese Education System, it also sets out a number of challenges that are aimed at bringing about fundamental changes in the way people relate to and work with each other, the way decision making is undertaken, and the need to establish a strong orientation to collective values, particularly a collective sense of responsibility (MEYE, 2005).

The Law, *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) includes the official policies central to various sectors of Maltese Education, which are sanctioned by the government so that Maltese Education will be ready to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Prominent among the various sections of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) are those addressing the setting-up of the ten new Colleges and the restructuring of the Education Division into two independent yet complementary Directorates. Reviewing these documents helps me put in perspective the recorded narratives and discourse of the interviewees and understand the underlying tension of certain interviewees.

## **4.9 Limitations of the Study**

A number of limitations of this study should be noted. First, the College reform had been sanctioned in 2006 and the ten Colleges that had been set up by the beginning of 2008. However, certain structures and personnel identified with school networks had not yet been introduced by December 2010 (the stage when I stopped collecting data). Although the 10 colleges had all been set up, there were still some missing structures (in particular the physical buildings of the schools), the review of the current NMC (teachers had complained that they were in the dark regarding the proposed National Curriculum Framework), as well as the employment of new personnel as established by the Education Act of 2006 (Laws of Malta, 2006). Educators in schools argued that they were neither well informed nor prepared to handle new national policies, especially those directly associated with the College reform.

All this placed certain limitations on the data collection of both Phases. I could not ask questions that addressed policies related to areas and issues emanating from the College reform that were not yet in place (as those mentioned above) because the interviewed practitioners were not in a position to answer them. Consequently I could not record any related discourse that could have presented the participants' interpretations, opinions, attitudes and perspectives about certain provisions of the College reform that had not yet been realized.

Although there were gaps and missing links in the administrative structure and practices of the College, all interviewees were exceptionally receptive. Accordingly, I was still able to collect robust data on the four key themes that formed the essence of my research questions, which could have important implications in the development of the Colleges in the Maltese Islands.

In this study the Assistant Heads (SMTs) and Heads of Department (HoDs) were not involved in the study. With hindsight, their participation could have been beneficial to the study because they are considered an important group in the hierarchical structure of school leadership and management and school governance. They could have offered something new and different to what was learnt from those who had participated in the research.

Finally, I noted that this research had limitations using qualitative tools only. Adopting a mixed methodology, I could have supplemented the qualitative data by distributing a self-administered questionnaire among a random sample of the Heads of School, teachers and even SMTs (who were left out of the study) of the ten Colleges. Embracing a mixed methodology approach could have enabled the identification of more aspects, possible challenges and differences in the Maltese educators' perceptions and stance towards the statutory reforms of intra- and inter-school joint working and the implications for leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability. Employing a quantitative design could have created the space for a larger population and provided the basis for the analyses to reach statistical significance. Not embracing the quantitative approach prevented the sample of the survey from being a more representative one. However, it should be noted that the findings from the current study show a significant result, robust enough to provide Maltese System with the appropriate leverage to achieve that much needed transformation.

## **4.10 Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis means understanding and interpreting the larger meaning of the collected data. The analytical process of qualitative data, which involves a number of stages, starting from arranging the collected data in systemised categories and posting them in folders and sub-folders and



finishing with themes or issues (Stake, 1995 and Wolcott, 1994), entails developing an analysis from the narratives and discourse of the interviewees and field notes collected during observation sessions of CCoH meetings so as to develop themes and perspectives.

#### ***4.10.1 Interviews***

The process and procedure of the analysis of data began as soon as the data of each respective phase was collected. The same procedure was applied to both Phases of the study. The analytical stage of the collected interview data involved a number of preliminary steps to the transcription process; steps that were needed to establish a structured classification system of the recorded data. First and foremost I transferred all the interviews, which had been recorded on a digital voice recorder, onto two computer folders (one marked as 'raw' data and the other as 'working' data) that were kept separate (Thomas, 2011). Having two folders meant that I could work on the 'working' data folder, and have a copy of the original recording stored in the 'raw' data folder. Such procedure was adopted for both phases of the study.

I then took these two folders and systematically organised their copied recordings into four temporary sub-folders with the temporary names of central authorities, college leaders, school leaders and teachers. The temporary sub-folders and their respective names were discarded once their stored recordings were converted into computer readable files and placed in independent and systemized four coded folders (Set A, B, C and D respectively), in conformity with the professional working status of the interviewees (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994):

- Set A: (Minister, policymakers and permanent secretaries);
- Set B: (College Principals);
- Set C: (Heads of School – HoS);
- Set D: (Primary and Secondary school teachers).

Although coding qualitative data gave rise to debate (Bryman, 2004), the procedure enriched my data classification because it facilitated the filtering and later the in-depth analysis of the recorded data.

I then took the 'working' data folder (Thomas, 2011) of the respective phase and created further sub-divisions (see Tables 4.8 and 4.9) for each of the above-mentioned 'Set' folders. Set A, which grouped the policy-makers together, did not need any sub-divisions. However, the interviews of Sets B, C and D were separately organized into other sub-folders indexed as College One, Five, Six and Seven. I then took the sub-folders of Sets C and D, identified as 'Colleges', and sub-divided them into other sub-folders denoted by the sector in which the interviewee worked; that is whether in a Primary, or Secondary School or Junior Lyceum (Creswell, 2009). The objective for this classification procedure was to make the data distribution comprehensible and easy to follow, facilitate the analysis, and provide a rich picture and a thorough understanding of the narrative data across the board.

**Table 4.8:** Classification of Phase One Interviewees' Data

Set A	Set B	Set C		Set D	
Minister, Policy-makers, Permanent Secretary	College Principal of College One	Heads of Primary Schools of College One	Heads of Secondary Schools and Junior Lyceums of College One	Teachers of Primary Schools of College One	Teachers of Secondary Schools and Junior Lyceums of College One

**Table 4.9:** Classification of Phase Two Interviewees' Data

Set A	Set B	Set C		Set D	
Minister, Policy-makers, Permanent Secretary	College Principals of Colleges One, Five, Six and Seven	Heads of Primary Schools of College One, Five, Six and Seven	Heads of Secondary Schools and Junior Lyceums of College One, Five Six and Seven	Teachers of Primary Schools of College One, Five, Six and Seven	Teachers of Secondary Schools and Junior Lyceums of College One, Five, Six and Seven

Transcription of the interviews of both phases (54 in Phase One and 142 in Phase Two), for which permission was sought from each and every interviewee at the beginning of the respective interview, began almost in sync with the administration of interviews. Consequently, transcription was done concurrently while conducting the interviews. Creswell (2009, p.184) maintained: 'that qualitative data analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data...' The interviews of both phases were transcribed verbatim. A copy of the transcribed interviewee was presented to its respective speaker for verification and approval. When member validation of transcripts was completed, all transcriptions were posted to folders and sub-folders, as explained above.

After transcribing all interviews I adopted the selective reading approach of the transcripts to obtain a general sense of the information, to reflect on its overall meaning, and to facilitate the selection of thematic statements. The careful reading of the transcripts, complemented by reflection, helped me select relevant interview discourse and narratives and cluster them together under the emerging themes.

As I read I entered marginal notes that identified repetitions of words, and ideas, which I later found valuable because they gave the selected data an identity under specific labels and categories. Likewise, as I reflected, I also wrote notes in the margins labelling categories with in vivo terms because I thought that using the actual language of the interviewees could be beneficial when converting the selected text into concepts and labelling them as themes and sub-themes. In my reflections I addressed:

- the general notions emerging from the interviews;
- the tone of these notions;

- the level of credibility of the recorded discourse and narratives;
- the overall depth of the data.

The organization of the selected responses in categories was also consistent with the broad interview questions and the three areas of context, input and process (see Appendix 3). Extraneous data was isolated and placed in a separate folder to store for future use, if needed.

When analysing the selected data I adopted the style that Thomas (2011) referred to as ‘Network Analysis’ (p.198). He underlined the usefulness of such analysis for researchers who established a central theme to which were linked a number of sub-themes. Such style also highlighted the relationship between themes. Consequently, items that had similar subject matter were fused together under thematic categories. As Thomas (2011) claimed, network analysis provided ‘a hierarchical organisation of the ideas contained’ (p.198) in the data. Network analysis of data helped me condense the selected data to four central themes (Thomas, 2011) (collaboration and networking, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between schools). Using the generation of themes around these key concepts central to the four research questions, I highlighted the relevant and salient thematic discourses that I thought were important, and which Meuser and Nagel in Bogner *et al.* (2009) claimed was required before attempting to analyse the selected data. In other words, categories and themes were identified through what Harry *et al.* (2005, p.5) described as ‘the interpretive lens of the researcher.’ The selected data was also analysed to identify:

- diversity or similarity among the interviewees belonging to the same set and from different sets (see above for ‘Set’ folders);
- attitudes that suggested fostering of the sanctioned reforms;
- attitudes that suggested resistance to the sanctioned reforms;
- any form of apprehension experienced by interviewees due to the ongoing reforms;
- issues and challenges that the reforms were offering to the interviewees.

During the classification and analysis of the chosen data attention was also given to the attitude and voiced opinion of the interviewee towards the implementation of the endorsed reforms. Thus, those narratives and discourse that contained hints of criticism and resistance to the sanctioned reforms were separated from those that suggested support and willingness to foster and reinforce the ongoing reforms, and were placed in distinctive folders. Such clustering was adopted to differentiate the diverse opinions expressed by the interviewed respondents.

#### **4.10.2 Observations’ Field Notes**

The process and procedure of the typed observation field notes and the systematic classification of such data began as soon as every observation session was completed, which meant that the typing was done concurrently with the collection of the data (Creswell, 2009). Every typed version of observed field notes was handed to the respective College Principal for verification, clarification if needed, and approval (Bryman, 2004). The verified versions were then copied onto two computer folders (one

marked as ‘raw’ data and the other as ‘working’ data) that were kept separate. Having two folders meant that I could work on the ‘working’ data folder, and have a copy of the original typed data stored in the ‘raw’ data folder (Thomas, 2011). The same procedure was adopted for both Phases of the study.

I then took the ‘working’ data folder for Phase One and created a ‘College One’ folder with four ‘Cluster’ sub-folders (see Table 4.9). Cluster A sub-folder contained demographic information, such as the place where the meeting was held and the setting. Cluster B, encompassed information about how participants interacted during the meetings. Cluster C contained information about the way meetings progressed and Cluster D embodied information about the topics that were discussed during the meetings. For Phase Two of the study I took the ‘working’ data folder and created four ‘College’ folders (College One, Four, Five, Six and Seven) with four ‘Cluster’ sub-folders for each ‘College’ folder (see Table 4.10). The objective for this classification procedure was to make the data distribution comprehensible and easy to follow, facilitate the analysis, and provide a rich picture and a thorough understanding of the observation data across the CCoH meetings of the four colleges (Creswell, 2009 Miles and Huberman, 1994).

**Table 4.10:** Phase One Observation Data – College One

Cluster A	Cluster B	Cluster C	Cluster D
Demographic Information	Information about how the participants interacted during the meetings	Information about how meetings developed	Information about the topics that were discussed during the meetings

**Table 4.11:** Phase Two Observation Data – Colleges One, Five, Six and Seven

Cluster A	Cluster B	Cluster C	Cluster D
Demographic Information	Information about how the participants interacted during the meetings	Information about how meetings developed	Information about the topics that were discussed during the meetings

Once again, I adopted the selective reading approach of the typed and verified field notes to obtain a general sense of the information, to reflect on its overall meaning and to facilitate the selection of thematic statements. The careful reading of these notes, complemented by reflection, helped me select relevant observation data and group together under similar themes.

As I read I entered marginal notes, which I later found valuable because they gave the selected data an identity under specific labels and categories (Thomas, 2011). Likewise, as I reflected, I also wrote notes in the margins. In my reflections I addressed:

- the general notions emerging from the meetings;
- the tone of these notions;

- the overall depth of the data.

‘Network analysis’ (Thomas, 2011, p.198) of data helped me condense the selected data to the four central themes (Thomas, 2011) (collaboration and networking, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between schools) of the study. Using the generation of themes around these key concepts central to the four research questions, I highlighted the relevant thematic data that I thought was important. Consequently, categories and themes emerged. The selected data was also analysed to identify:

- diversity or similarity among the participants;
- attitudes that sustained the sanctioned reforms;
- attitudes that suggested resistance to the endorsed reforms;
- any form of apprehension experienced by the participants due to the ongoing reforms;
- issues and challenges that the reforms were offering for the Heads of School.

#### **4.10.3 Official Documents**

Two major official documents are central to the study. The first document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) was published with the intent of serving as a discussion document. The discussion spearheaded the introduction of the Law: *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) a year later in 2006. The two documents were reviewed within a specific context, because both were sustaining the government’s policy drive to address the issues of autonomy and decentralization of state schools. Autonomy and decentralization were going to be introduced through the Maltese College Reform and the structural evolution of the Education Division into a restructured education authority composed of two independent Directorates. The review of the two mentioned documents is rather significant for the whole study since they underline the Maltese Government’s strategy to transform the existing educational system into one that will foster new professional educators ready to embrace the ongoing innovative changes and reforms, and create learning communities that will provide the appropriate scenario to ensure quality education for all.

##### *1. The seminal document – FACTS*

I read the document several times and used the four key concepts of collaboration and networking, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between schools to group the content of the seminal document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005). This document is divided in five chapters and presents a number of aspects and factors within school networks, together with a restructured education authority. I used this division to create five files in which I entered reflective notes that I formulated when examining the content of every chapter. The review and analysis of the seminal document gave me a deeper understanding of the content and its significance to the relevant articles of the Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006).

The analysis of *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) in conjunction with the interview and observation data, give the attitude and voiced opinion of the respective participants towards the implementation of the endorsed reforms a significant meaning. Those narratives and discourse that contain hints of criticism and resistance to the sanctioned reforms and those that suggest support and willingness to foster and reinforce the ongoing reforms can be placed within a context. Consequently, as I reflected I

formulated a substantial understanding of the diverse opinions expressed by the participants. Consequently, categories and themes emerged.

## *2. The Education Act – Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327*

I read through the document, *Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006). I selected only the articles of Part II (the functions of the two Directorates of Education) and Part V (addressed the formation of Colleges of State Schools) of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). I then grouped the content of the relevant Parts of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) under the four key concepts of collaboration and networking, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between schools.

The analysis of the relevant parts of the Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) in conjunction with the interview, and the observation data give the attitude and voiced opinion of the respective participants towards the implementation of the endorsed reforms a significant meaning. Again the diverse stances of the interviewees could be placed within a context. As I reflected, I formulated a substantial understanding of the diverse opinions and attitudes demonstrated by the participants. Consequently, categories and themes emerged.

## **4.11 The Literature Review**

Having identified the four key analytical themes for the research, I began a review of related online literature (for example the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Commonwealth Secretariat – on educational development in the small states of the Commonwealth, and the National College for School Leadership - NCSL) using key word searches to gradually explore the ideas and citations that emerged from the use of various books and journals. Where the need arose, I took the emanating concepts and quotes back to the original source material for further contextual analysis.

This process yielded an extensive corpus of international literature. Consequently, global literature, on the above mentioned four key analytical themes, provided a significant share of the academic data for this study. Major references were also drawn from studies undertaken by various researchers renowned for their research on the four key themes of the study and presented through texts or papers in international journals. Local literature also contributed substantially to the research. I reviewed local literature, written by Maltese authors that focused on one or more of the key research themes.

Both the local and international literature had helped me to adopt a more analytical and objective approach to the analysis of the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools as executed and sustained by:

- the leaders at the Ministry of Education, Employment and Family (MEEF) and at the Education Directorates;
- the leaders of Colleges and schools;
- the teachers

The literature also highlighted the growing body of knowledge on leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between the

educational institutions. It had also assisted me in examining the nature of the implications for leadership, governance and accountability, in the context of the above mentioned form of collaboration. It had enabled me to present a realistic picture of how the study's key themes were being manifested in the Maltese Colleges and their schools.

#### **4.12 Concluding Comment**

The key objective of this chapter was to further investigate, through the qualitative techniques of interviews and observation together with a review of official documents, the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. It was meant to study also the implications for leadership, governance and accountability relationships in the context of such collaboration. The adopted strategy consisted of an analysis of the collected data on issues relating to the four above mentioned key themes. Findings and discussion, emanating from the collected data, would be presented in the next two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6).

## **Chapter 5 - The Findings**

### **5.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I present the relevant findings of this study, which highlight the wider implications of the reforms. The outcomes have been abstracted from data collected from reviews of official documents, individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews and observations of the College Council of Heads (CCoH) meetings. I have used the four key themes of the research questions (networking and collaboration, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between schools) as a classification model to organize the findings that emerged from this study. I have also used the following abbreviations (in their broad form) for clarity of the direct quotations of the various interviewees and the phases of the study. Consequently, the selection of the taped transcripts I present in this chapter can be traced back to the individual interviewee. The following are the abbreviations:

- Ph1 (Phase One)
- Ph2 (Phase Two)
- J.L. ('grammar' school type locally called Junior Lyceum)
- Sec. (Secondary School)
- Pri. (Primary School)
- PM (Policy-maker)
- PS (Permanent Secretary)
- P (Principal)
- HoS (Heads of School/Head of School)
- T (Teacher)

The findings reported in this chapter are divided into four main sections (each containing a number of sub-sections) headed by the introduction (5.0). The introduction precedes a presentation of the organizational structure of the schools' sample of the research, which includes information on the classification of students into classes, curricular content and the assigning of classes to their respective teachers (5.1). A presentation of material based on the core findings obtained from the data collected from one college during Phase One of the study follows (5.2). I then present the findings that emerge from the data collected from four colleges during Phase Two (5.3). In this phase the data was collected from three colleges and revisiting the college of Phase One. I also provide an overview of the structure of the colleges and the various levels in each college. I then present a cross-case analysis of the two phases (5.4). The chapter ends with concluding comment (5.5).

### **5.1 Maltese State-maintained Schools: Organisational Structures**

#### ***5.1.1 Context***

The four researched regional colleges (initially known as 'School Networks') could be regarded as unique educational institutions because of their regional and geographical characteristics. The boundaries that separated them from their counterparts were very evident. They were all self-contained and existed within distinctive social and cultural environments.

The information that emerged from the analysis of official documents indicated that each of the four Colleges participating in the study incorporated a number of Kindergartens, Primary schools, a number of single sex 'grammar' school-type (locally known as Junior Lyceums) and Secondary



schools for boys and girls. Additionally, the cohort of students attending state-maintained Primary schools, at the time of the research, followed two systems: Classes of Years 1 to 3 were all mixed ability classes, whereas Years 4 to 6 followed the streaming model. The streaming model was abandoned in 2010. Students that had reached the secondary level were grouped into two categories:

1. those who had passed the National 11+ Exams were attending Junior Lyceum schools;
2. those who failed these National Exams were attending Secondary schools’.

One of the four colleges participating in the study housed together the Secondary and Junior Lyceum students. Distinction was made by class reference codes. However, in the other three colleges, the two categories of students at the secondary level were placed in distinct schools. Thus, each of the three other colleges had two single sex secondary schools and two single sex Junior Lyceum schools (see Appendix 2, p.218). One of the colleges also had the Music and Drama schools, Arts and Craft Centre and a Special Unit attached to it. The other three colleges had neither Arts and Craft schools nor schools for children with special needs.

### *1. Classification of students and taught content*

On the directives of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE), one of the combined J.L and Secondary school for boys was following the new ‘track’ and ‘setting’ models of classification and teaching. The Head of this school stated:

The school I lead is implementing the system of classification and teaching as officially stipulated. For the past three years we have been implementing the ‘three track model’:

- Track 1 - The basic skilled student
- Track 2 - The lesser academically oriented students
- Track 3 - The academically oriented students

This is complemented by the ‘setting model’. The objective of the ‘setting model’ is to fine tune classification of students’ abilities. Both models cater for the education of **ALL** (interviewee’s emphasis) the students, **ensuring that no child is left behind** (interviewee’s stress). (HoS3, J.L. & Sec., College Five, Ph2)

The teachers in this school were teaching different syllabi that catered for the three different groups of students. The ‘Track 3’ students followed the Junior Lyceum syllabi, the ‘Track 2’ students followed the Secondary level syllabi and the ‘Track 1’ students followed a watered down version of the ‘Track 2’ syllabi. This model was applied across all the taught subjects. As a result of the ‘setting’ model, that complemented and ran parallel to the ‘track’ model, all students in the three tracks were clustered in different ‘sets’ for the core subjects’ (Maths, Maltese and English) lessons. The classification was based on a mixture of summative and formative assessments.

The content level of the taught material for ‘Track 1’ classes was a less academically demanding version than that for ‘Track 2’ students’ level. The half-yearly exam papers for cohorts of the ‘three tracks’ were school based but the annual exam papers for the ‘three tracks’ cohorts were

national exam papers. Additionally, the Head of the combined J.L. and Secondary school in College Five claimed:

The education authorities gave the school the leeway to formulate the annual exam paper for the 'Track 1' students. Here I must point out that there exists what we have come to call 'a grey area' between 'Track 2 and 'Track 1' students since it is not easy to distinguish between the two. Furthermore, students could move up or down the 'setting' models on the basis of their performance and consultations with the subject teachers. (HoS3, J.L. & Sec., College Five, Ph2).

The implications for this mixture of student abilities added to the challenges that school leaders were encountering while working to sustain the school network reform that clustered Maltese State schools in networks and have them working collaboratively. The fact that the colleges provided for different levels of student ability meant that students were following different levels of teaching programmes. One of the Heads of the J.L. and Sec. School, during one of the CCoH meetings that I observed, pointed out that such a complex scenario made it more difficult for the school leaders to create space on the timetable for intra and inter-school collaboration (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph2). This was corroborated by what the Head of another combined school in the secondary sector had commented during one of the observed CCoH meetings:

Having such a complex mix of student abilities does not help matters. The situation is rather pain staking particularly when trying to create availability on the timetable for teachers to meet with their colleagues and their counterparts from other schools to discuss curricular matters. Matters have been made somewhat more difficult to manage. (HoS3, J.L. & Sec., College Five, Ph2)

## *2. Assigning classes to teachers*

Assigning classes to teachers has always been the prerogative of the Head of School (HoS) working in collaboration with his Senior Management Team (SMT) and occasionally after consultations with the teachers involved. Such was the practice across all Maltese State-maintained schools. However, there was no one common model as to what strategy leaders of schools followed. They were free to formulate their own system. The way Heads of School (HoS) assigned teaching responsibilities to their staff either facilitated or complicated matters as to whether teachers could meet to discuss curricular matters.

## **5.2 Phase One**

### ***5.2.1 Case Study of College One***

The geographical distinctiveness of College One made it an ideal subject of inquiry. The boundary that separated it from its counterparts was very real; it was self-contained and existed within social and cultural realities that were idiosyncratic. College One offered a comprehensive environment in which to analyse the progress of intra and inter-school working in state-maintained Colleges in the Maltese Islands.

### *1. Demographic data of College One in Phase One*

Taking account of the context in which Phase One of the study was conducted, I present demographic data for contextual clarity. In this section I present the different levels, the respective number of primary, secondary and the 'grammar' school-type (locally known Junior Lyceums) schools, the school practitioners and student populations of College One during Phase One of the study:

Phase One (Scholastic years 2007 - 2008)

- 11 coeducational Kindergarten centres housed in primary school grounds;
- 11 coeducational state Primary schools;
- 2 Area Secondary schools (1 for boys and 1 for girls);
- 2 'grammar' school-type Junior Lyceums (one for boys and one for girls). The Junior Lyceum cohorts of students were still housed in the same building as those attending Area Secondary;
- a student population of 3531 (Kindergarten to Form 5);
- 130 Primary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of School to Kindergarten Assistants (there were 7 Heads, 4 Acting Heads, 10 Assistant Heads, 76 Teachers and 33 other educators – Kindergarten Assistants and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs));
- 209 Secondary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of School to LSAs (there were 2 Heads, 7 Assistant Heads, 159 Heads of Department (HODs) and teachers, 41 other educators – instructors and LSAs).

### ***5.2.2 The Primary Theme of Networking and Collaboration***

The findings drawn from a large set of narrative accounts, observation field notes of CCoH meetings and reviewing official documents are presented in this section and discussed in Chapter 6. These findings were selected because they highlighted the perceptions views and opinions of the participants, and the proposed policies and sanctioned articles of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) central to the meta-theme of networking and collaboration. The findings were organised in a number of sections and each incorporated a number of sub-sections that contained data pivotal to the theoretical issues underlining the primary research question of collaboration:

- inferences to the history of informal collaboration and collaborative practice;
- the need for a collaborative practice in a policy context that requires joint-working by individual schools and educators;
- reactions to the new way of joint-working;
- the benefits and the challenges initiated by the new form of collaborative and collegial practice.

#### *1. Inferences to the history of informal networking and collaboration*

The analysis of the data collected from interviews and observation sessions indicated a history of informal intra- and inter-school collaboration prior to the official implementation of collaborative practices as propounded by the Education Act (Laws of Malta, 1988 and 2006). Many of the respondents, particularly the Heads of School in the primary sector, claimed that circumstances had made them seek each other's support. They argued that in the past, because of their geographical detachment from the mainland, they felt isolated from the Education Division (now called the Directorate). Thus Heads sought to collaborate with their peers to overcome this sense of isolation. However, they acknowledged that their initial attempts at collaboration were rather rudimentary and were very informal. Given that they only collaborated on matters concerned with the mundane managerial issues of the school and not curricular ones, there was consensus that their model of joint

working needed revisiting. The participants considered their rather rudimentary form of collaborative practice as a precursor model that exposed them to the demands that the Act of 2006 (Laws of Malta, 2006) would endorse. As one Head of Primary school claimed:

On a general note, we Heads of School (of College One) know that the collaborative and collegial practice as advocated by the networking reform is not new to our schools. In the past we networked and collaborated on managerial and administrative matters that concerned the day to day running of the schools and not on academically related issues. Admittedly, the reform has institutionalised and refined the crude form of the networking system that was in practice and it has expanded the areas in which to network. We are now starting to work together at the academic level. To take an example we are now working together in the compilation and printing of the half-yearly exam papers for **all the schools within our College** (interviewee's emphasis). (HoS1, Pri., College One, Ph1)

## *2. Having intra- and inter-school collaboration*

When interviewed, the Minister of Education, Youth and Employment claimed that he had been spearheading the current education reform since 1998. He believed that only the innovative dynamics of intra- and inter-school joint working compounded by the commitment of school practitioners would sustain structural and cultural change. The Minister, besides recognizing and advocating the need for collaboration and collegiality, also shaped the process and the wording of the law that would endorse intra and inter-school collaboration. The Minister claimed:

Our professional stakeholders of the current reforms, ranging from college and school leaders to teachers, have to find the correct formula so that the paradigm shift that is needed will be smooth and continuous. We know that Heads of school and teachers prefer to work alone. Now they need to open up to work together. School practitioners need **to work as a team adopting a collegial spirit** (interviewee's emphasis). They need to share their work, particularly good practice, and learn from each other. (Minister1, Ph1)

Such convictions corroborated what the Minister stated in the forward of *For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta (FACTS)* (MEYE, 2005): 'Only when people share in shaping the changes around them will they enable and empower others to do the same.' (Galea, 2005, p.xii)

Analysing the interviews' discourse and the observation field notes that were central to the theme of intra- and inter-school collaboration I was able to identify the presence of other common sub-themes:

- controversy surrounding the collaborative and collegial model;
- the benefits of intra- and inter-school joint-working;
- the various challenges in order to sustain the reform.

Such investigation gave me the impression that the way schools had become organised into colleges and the manner in which members of staff had been working and sharing knowledge suggested that intra- and inter-school collaboration was in one way or another being fostered. The majority of

interviewees claimed that the new style of joint-working introduced by the networking reform was important and required. However, the interviewees added that the recently introduced reforms, which gave them new forms of practice, also raised new challenges. They held that existing practices had to give way to more formalized forms of collaboration, where all schools worked as a team and everyone needed to participate. The Head of a J.L. and Secondary school argued:

Working collaboratively was no longer an option. Every educator in our College has to work for the good of the whole college. We all have to work together, learn together and share our good practice with others. Thus working collaboratively acquired a new dimension. (HoS2, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

### *3. Controversy surrounding the 2006 collaborative and collegial model*

The ongoing reforms in the local education sector, particularly at school level, which highlighted grouping schools together to form colleges, meant changes to organizational structures and how they worked together. The interview data and the observation field notes suggested that the reforms had affected, and would continue to impact both the *modus operandi* of the school and the opinion of school practitioners. Consequently, as the findings showed, there were reactions from those at the helm and those at the periphery.

The Minister knew that HoS had been used to working and managing their schools alone and not as members of a team. He also knew that teachers gave their whole hearted attention, primarily, to their classroom and did not seek to share their practice. Consequently, wanting to change such *modus operandi* of educators, the Minister argued for the collaborative model:

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nation-States and many other entities survive better through securing partnerships...Schools...can only prosper and flourish if they form and gain strengths through new alliances. (Galea, 2005, p.xii)

Some of the interviewees' discourse substantiated the issue of their school and classroom as 'their kingdom' and that they were reluctant to see it otherwise. In fact some interviewed HoS and teachers, in their discourse claimed that they felt more comfortable working in isolation. The Head of a Primary school acknowledged that:

Unfortunately, the attitude of looking at the school as **my school** or the classroom as **my classroom** (interviewee's emphasis) and I do what I can to improve the image of **my school** or **my classroom** first; is still very much a reality. (HoS2, Pri., College One, Ph1))

Interviewees at the school level acknowledged that the College Reform was shrouded with scepticism, and anxiety about what the future might hold. Such apprehension and cynicism could be summed up in what one Primary school teacher stated:

The fact that at this point in time we are still thinking that our respective schools and classrooms are our first communities, suggests that we are far from a college community. Many have strong doubts about its success. This state of affairs has created an aura of cynicism among school practitioners,

which is adding to the existing anxiety and which I feel is impacting on our willingness to sustain and own the reform. (T1, Pri., College One, Ph1)

The theme of intra- and inter-school collaboration continued to be immersed in controversy. There were some who felt that they were already working according to the provisions of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) and did not see the need for the implementation of the new reforms. Others recognised that supporting the current form of collaboration and networking would be beneficial. They maintained that the recently introduced form of collaboration would sustain the new way of joint working for Maltese schools and their stakeholders. They claimed that grouping schools to form colleges created the appropriate form of collaboration that required joint-working by individual schools. Consequently, they were endorsing the position held by the Education Authorities and policy-makers who recognised the need for such a culture change if Maltese education was to keep abreast with its global counterparts.

Admittedly, although reactions varied, generally the need to work together was gaining support, even when the idea of the college was still in an embryonic stage. One J.L. and Secondary school teacher observed that:

Teachers need to understand the importance of working in a group because if we do not work in groups, then the odds are that we will go off in different directions without a common objective. (T1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

#### *4. The Benefits of intra and inter-school joint-working*

The Minister's statement, that the child in Malta had been central to his vision, became significant in understanding his rationale at transforming the *modus operandi* of Maltese educators from one of isolation to a collaborative and collegial endeavour. He wanted to transform Maltese Education, which would place the child as the focal point of the school's endeavour. He believed that this could be achieved by creating new networks of State primary and secondary schools. Data from this study clarified and highlighted the Minister's foresight at acknowledging the benefits behind collaboration. The Minister claimed that:

Around 2002, I concluded that to provide continuity in the educational journey of our children, we need to establish networks, to set up colleges, joint-working communities, which will collaborate and work together to provide improved quality education in the Maltese Islands so that all children will have equal opportunities and be empowered to succeed. (Minister1, Ph1)

This far-reaching objective, which is at the heart of the conceptual framework of the seminal document *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005), finds substance in the words of one interviewed J.L. and Secondary school teacher who maintained that:

The College Reform has set an objective for all educators, ensuring that no child is left behind. I think that this has become our focus, as a result of which our daily work has acquired a new meaning. If the proposed objective of the document *FACTS* is to be achieved, we educators (whether members of a school or a college) have to work as a group, as a team. (T2, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

Respondents identified three main benefits for Maltese Education when collaboration is nurtured and maintained: the fostering of dialogue amongst school professionals; strengthening intra- and inter-school collaboration, and creating synergy and collegiality within the particular school and between schools.

*a. Collaboration fosters dialogue*

The varied data demonstrated that both the Heads of School and teachers expressed convictions and opinions advocating the College reform and the nature of collaboration in a policy context because they believed that the post 2006 transformation had fostered and reinforced what already existed. They argued that growing a culture of open dialogue among stakeholders, as recommended by the relevant articles of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) had become the rationale of College One. They had come to understand that the new model of collaboration broadened the teachers' expertise and learning opportunities that no single school could offer, since it provoked the sharing of expert leadership and provided a forum for healthy discussions among them. As one Primary School teacher convincingly summed up the perception of many of the interviewees of College One:

Collaboration does affect individuals. It is a learning curve for us all. We are learning the benefits behind collaboration, primarily to share and discuss. Once we **all** (interviewee's emphasis) start to appreciate these benefits, as many are doing, we will do our utmost to maintain this new culture of dialogue and working with others. I have noticed colleagues, who in the past were reserved, and are now opening up, sharing and discussing with others. They are learning to share, to be challenged and to challenge. This is manifesting itself in fostering and sustaining a new culture of inter-school dialogue, particularly among us teachers. (T2, Pri., College One, Ph1)

*b. Intra- and inter-school joint-working*

The Minister's endeavour, advocating intra- and inter-school collaboration within a policy context, seemed to be showing results even though some of the varied cohort of interviewees of Phase One claimed that they had felt more in control when they worked in isolation. Currently many of the participants were growing conscious of the need to work and learn as a team and to collaborate. One interviewed policy maker stated that:

In the past school leaders and teachers, while implementing set and clear directives from the Education Division, worked in isolation. Since the launching of the network pilot project we started to witness experiences where schools were working together. Such collaborative examples were the fruition of the Council of Heads meetings. **Yes** (interviewee's emphasis) considering the workings of these Councils I can boldly say that we have made progress because the stakeholders have learned a great deal from the cross-sectorial forms of discussion that the Council offers. (PM1, Ph1)

Such an outlook is compounded by the claims of one Primary Head of School:

The College concept empowers collaboration and promotes collegiality. It brings people together to discuss and to learn from each other without losing their identity and their individuality. We Heads feel that we have grown

stronger because we are no longer working in isolation but as a community. All Heads of school conform to policies and decisions taken by the College Council of Heads. There is uniformity in policy application because what is happening in one school is happening in all the schools within the College. (HoS4, Pri., College One, Ph1)

Again this is propounded by what different teachers said regarding its consequences on the students, and is surmised in what one Primary School teacher stated:

The workings and application of the College reform has offered more opportunities for collaboration. It has created opportunities for children from different schools to meet. It has brought the schools closer and has exposed the students to the ideas of their peers living in other villages and attending the village schools. (HoS5, Pri., College One, Ph1)

*c. Combined energy*

The sub-theme of the benefits of working collaboratively was highlighted by my observation sessions of the Council of Heads meetings (a new governance structure introduced in 2006) of College One. Overall they recognised that working together meant having one concentrated dynamism and not pockets of independent and isolated energies. The significance of this new tier in the structure of the Colleges was acknowledged and underlined by one policy maker, who aware of the fast-changing educational landscape, both locally and internationally, went on to state that:

The Council of Heads is in fact a networking forum for leaders who come together to discuss round the table the way forward for the college. They meet to discuss, share experiences and good practice. Bringing together all the leaders of a group of schools is crucial to the reform because once they understand the implications and benefits of intra- and inter-school collaboration they can then mentor and use their leadership skills to foster among their members of staff this new collaborative culture. (PM2, Ph1)

*d. Collaboration: The diversity dimension*

It emerged from the study that the new model of collaboration as established by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) was gaining support among its stakeholders because it appeared to be sustaining diversity. The interviewees referred to exemplars of collaboration, particularly to the instances when students from various Primary schools met to hold various college based activities. The students brought and shared with other children their village culture. They maintained that it was a pleasure to see all those students coming together and yet retaining the identity of their school and village.

*5. Challenges*

The analysis of the data revealed the various challenges around the theme of intra- and inter-school collaboration, which the different stakeholders encountered. The Principal of College One expressed his concerns about the anxiety of many of the Heads of School when he stated with considerable emphasis that:

Understanding that each school has multiple stakeholders helps us appreciate more that reinforcing the new mode of collaboration and the collegiality that



it cultivates will **neither be tension free nor without challenges** (interviewee's emphasis). (P1, College One, Ph1)

Many HoS and teachers also emphasized the human dynamic factor and concurred that they had to acknowledge that others could have their ways of doing things, which may be either similar or different. As one interviewed J.L. and Secondary School teacher contended:

Policy-makers seem to have forgotten that reforms and the development that they bring is a living and dynamic process and that adapting to change, may very well take time. In our schools we have educators who are either in their late forties and fifties and who have been used to a prescriptive model of change. Getting them to change overnight will not be without challenges. (T3, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

Overall, interviewees agreed that teachers shy away from the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint-working and are not ready to share their practice because, after years in the profession, they have acquired an inherent culture of working alone. Most of the interviewees admitted that behind the closed doors of their classroom they feel secure in their domain. Many of the interviewed Heads admitted that one of their greatest challenges will be to help the staff in their school adopt this new form of collaborative and collegial way of working. Such concern was well conveyed by one HoS who argued that:

Owning the reform by all those concerned will not be without challenges and tension because adopting this new mode of collaboration and the collegial culture that it encourages can be an uphill struggle for some schools and some colleges more than others. (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

*a. Commitment to the reform*

The study also highlights the importance of commitment to the network reform. The interviewees' commitment to change and to maintaining the current education reform emerged as an important sub-theme. A J.L. and Secondary School teacher pointed out:

Practitioners need to be committed to the policy context that we are living and the change that it is nurturing. The success of this educational transformation depends on how committed we are to the reform and the changes that it generates. (T4, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

*b. Transforming the isolationist model*

The data showed that the HoS were not happy with the tension that the multiple reforms were generating. Their stories emphasised the evolving scenario compounded by new challenges that materialised. They concurred that one such challenge was acknowledging and accepting that they were no longer working alone but as part of a group. It became evident that they appreciated that as leaders of schools they had to strengthen and improve any current form of intra- and inter-school collaborative practices that required joint-working so that all their members of staff would be motivated to synergise and work together with their colleagues and peers.

The data around the theme of networking and collaboration made evident its huge implications for both school leaders and teachers and which in turn shaped the current differences. For instance there were tensions, concerns and challenges because of the envisaged changes, particularly in generating and sustaining an inter-school working relationship between schools and the wider community and also in reinforcing and retaining an intra-school working model. Conversely, the recorded stories also showed that the practitioners of College One were professionals who had the capacity of being agents of change and that they not only had communicative and listening skills but also the right attitude that would help College One to move from strength to strength.

*c. The issues of school identity and uniqueness*

The data highlighted the differences as to how the reform of collaboration was impacting the identity and uniqueness of the school. Many HoS and interviewed teachers claimed that the reform was curbing the village identity and uniqueness that each school enjoyed. One Head of Primary School argued:

The College reform has to respect the cultural identity of the school within the village and also the diversity that each school enjoys. Every school within College One always enjoyed a strong cultural identity with the village. The College concept and the spirit of collaboration that it manifests may destroy that. We are ready to sustain and lead others to adopt the new collaborative mentality, but our schools' cultural identity needs to be guaranteed. (HoS6, Pri., College One, Ph1)

In contrast, a small cohort of HoS and teachers believed that collaboration would not endanger the existence of the cultural identity of the school. They believed that collaboration could be achieved and the village school would retain its identity and uniqueness.

### ***5.2.3 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Leadership and Management***

The data (from interviews, observation of CCoH meetings and reviewing official documents) highlighted the implications, which the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working would have on educational leadership and management of the institutions involved. These implications are presented in a number of sub-themes:

- leadership roles, responsibilities and their inter-relationship;
- leadership skills;
- various leadership styles;
- concerns and challenges

#### *1. Educational leadership and management: Roles and responsibilities*

The data around the interviewees' understanding and opinion of leadership and management roles and responsibilities provided interesting feedback about the implications that the new model of joint working may have on leadership and management. Although some could differentiate between leadership and management, and others saw them as interrelated, they believed that both concepts were important if the organisation was to have any sense of purpose.

*a. The dimension of the leadership and management roles*

The study made evident the variance around the sub-theme of leadership and management roles. Many held that leadership influenced the performance and attitude of others. On the other hand some added that leadership was about sharing a vision and encouraging others to partake in that vision, and a few claimed that leadership was about identifying possible strategies or frameworks to enhance practice. However, the majority of interviewees maintained that leaders are the driving force behind the effort to sustain the vision of their organisation. One Head of Primary School stated that:

A leader needs to serve as a beacon for all the members of his/her institution and to help them participate in the collective vision of the school or college. If s/he is a good leader, the members of staff will follow because of his/her influence. A leader will help others develop by setting good examples and the proper standards. (HoS7, Pri., College One, Ph1)

On the concept of management the research demonstrated an interesting overall representation among the respondents. They associated management with the operative aspect of the organisation that they lead. They maintained that management is concerned with the actions and activities that leaders or managers perform so that their organisation will run efficiently and its work will be effective. One Head of Secondary School held that:

Management is more about the daily running of the institution and seeing to the activities that will help the organisation achieve its objectives and be effective. It is also about how one works with his/her members of staff. Management focuses on the procedures and systems that help the Head realize his/her vision for the institution. (HoS2, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

Many of the interviewees stated that the demarcation line between school leadership and management was not clear cut. Policy-makers held that school management was directly linked to school leadership because the management of a school was a practice related to the operation of the educational institution. Consequently, one policy maker argued that:

Leadership is about having vision, ordering priorities and getting others to go with you. Management is about functions, procedures and systems by which that vision is attained. Leadership acumen forms part of the school management turf. (PM3, Ph1)

Additionally, HoS agreed that leadership and management were interlinked. Considering their position and their work, they felt that the relationship between leadership and management in an educational environment was stronger than one may think. They said that when they entered the domain of Headship they also assumed a managerial role. They contended that they had to be both leaders and managers and believed that both were important for the school to move forward. They claimed that as leaders they influenced the outcomes and motivation of their staff and as managers they oversaw that their school was running efficiently and effectively.

There was consensus among HoS that the association between educational leadership and management was real because when focusing on organizational objectives and the implementation of educational policy, their leadership skills came into play. However, generally they concurred that

because of the new model of joint-working, finding a balance between their leadership and management roles was proving to be more challenging than expected. For instance, their work load included new responsibilities: releasing teachers (particularly the Primary school teacher) from the classroom to attend the 1½ hours weekly curricular meetings, mentoring new teachers, and planning the organization of school activities. The interviewed Heads of School agreed that finding equilibrium between leadership and management roles entailed more leadership prowess.

## *2. Leadership skills*

### *a. Leaders as change agents*

The narratives of HoS presented a heterogeneous picture around the crucial role of leaders of colleges and schools as change agents. The majority maintained that all leaders had to lead by example and show support for the reforms so that they could be acknowledged as change agents. One Head of Primary School stated that:

Heads of School need to work together so that the ongoing reforms and changes will be sustained. **We have to take our leadership roles with greater responsibility** [interviewee's emphasis] to be truly change agents. We have to empower our staff in sustaining the reform, which would continue to help our schools develop and grow. (HoS8, Pri., College One, Ph1)

On their part, policy-makers concurred that leaders must be dynamic, visionary, creative and innovative for them to be change agents. One policy maker stated:

I expect all current educational leaders to be change agents. College Principals and Heads of School must be ready to think out of the box, to challenge the traditional system, to motivate others and lead by example so that the ongoing reforms will be sustained. They need to have a **can do attitude** (interviewee's emphasis). I expect these leaders to be resourceful so as to sustain a culture of managing change. (PM2, Ph1)

Another policy maker corroborated the above and added:

College Principals must definitely be people who have the capacity of being change agents. It is important that these leaders can demonstrate integrity in the face of adversity. The current process of change and reforms is demanding and therefore it is important that College Principals provoke new ways that will help the members of staff along with the challenges that arise. The Principal needs to take a strategic overview of the whole College and initiate different activities that will empower Heads and teachers to work with one another and with other schools to enhance the College's ethos. (PM3, Ph1)

Many of the interviewees maintained that the reforms introduced change in attitude, in the modus operandi of the schools and the classroom, in staff motivation, and performance. Consequently, leaders were expected to empower others and have the appropriate skills to mentor others towards joint working. As one policy maker argued:

It is perhaps inevitable that a reform on such a scale will impact on the professional practitioners in all the teaching and administrative grades in all sectors of our education system. Consequently, leading and helping others to understand and own change will be a tall order. It will require skill, determination and perseverance. (PM1, Ph1)

*i. The complexity of change*

The study showed that overall, the diverse cohort of respondents agreed that change was complex and that it raised concerns, created tension and uncertainty. Acknowledging the complex nature of change and how it affected its stakeholders, the College Principal claimed that:

The complex nature of change requires time, patience, perseverance, commitment and trust. If change is to take place with the least possible disturbance and stress for its immediate stakeholders, school leaders and teachers must be responsible professionals. All school practitioners, regardless of their status, must consider the change process as an experience that will help them learn and grow collectively. They must all become change agents. It is everyone's responsibility. (P1, College One, Ph1)

*b. Building trust*

Trust was identified as critical to leading others to change. One teacher argued that:

Trusting in each other's commitment to the current shared venture is a must for all school leaders and practitioners. (T3, Pri., College One, Ph1)

Additionally, there emerged the overall claim that when there was trust, security and respect would follow. Almost all interviewed HoS agreed that when leaders understood the importance of trust, they would empower others to build their joint-working ventures on trust.

The majority of interviewed teachers contended that when a HoS gained the trust of the teachers, it would help him/her to promote the philosophy that everyone needed to be a change agent and that together they could make a difference. One Primary School teacher attested that:

Leadership's primary objective is to facilitate change and ensure that all members of staff support the initiative of the Head, even if it meant adopting a new way of working. This can be achieved if s/he manages to build a bond founded on trust. (T4, Pri., College One, Ph1)

*c. Leaders have to be bold and resolute*

HoS claimed that a leader had to be bold and resolute when addressing the challenges that arose due to the ongoing change process. They concurred that there would always be discontent and discord. Additionally, the College Principal stressed that given the presence of those cynical educators who had felt confident with the conservative model of leading and teaching, the process of change would not lack controversy. It also became evident that HoS found the situation challenging because they had to implement the policies and directives of the Directorates in such a short time. Consequently, they felt overwhelmed with work. Such a scenario created tension and was impacting the collaboration

between the Head and the teachers. In fact many Heads complained that they were suffering from burnout. The Head of a J.L. and Secondary School stated:

There is too much administrative work. Tasks take longer and very little time to do everything. There are moments when I am overcome with a sense of failure, particularly when I have to compromise my role of an educator. The challenge is creating a balance between respecting the views and opinions of my teachers and implementing the demands of the Directorates. In the current scenario HoS have to be strong, single-minded and understanding in the face of the opposition that may materialise. (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

The College Principal added that HoS had to be approachable but strong when managing difficult persons. Aware of the tensions and issues that existed in the schools, brought about by the quasi-despotic management of certain Heads, he stated that:

HoS have to be responsible and bold enough to admit that the conventional model of leadership and management was out-dated. (P1, College One, Ph1)

*d. Visionary leadership*

Interviewed teachers believed that current school leaders had to be visionary and set the needed direction that would take the schools forward. They claimed that they could relate well to such a leader. One J.L. and Secondary school teacher, whose discourse epitomised the opinion of the majority of teachers, stated:

A school leader has to have a vision, based on tangible and achievable goals that would help him/her set direction for the school. Having a vision also means ensuring that the school has enough resources (human and material) which will help the school achieve its goals. S/he has to have good communication skills, ready to listen and accept suggestions on how goals, which underline the school's vision, can be achieved. The leader, besides being committed to the cause and the vision, has to walk the talk. (T5, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

One Primary school teacher corroborated:

I think that a visionary HoS would find it easier in setting direction for the school. My HoS wants pupils to do well and she motivates us to commit ourselves to her vision. Her vision also comprises valuing our work and respecting our dignity. The Head's attitude motivates us to partake in her mission to achieve her vision for the school. Unfortunately this is not the case in all schools. (T5, Pri., College One, Ph1)

*e. Forging and sustaining intra-school relationships*

A number of participant teachers claimed that some Heads lacked the interpersonal relationship skill. Other teacher interviewees added that when the Heads implemented official policies and executed

tasks, they failed to appreciate the dynamics involved in working alongside people. One J.L. and Secondary school teacher claimed:

Our HoS need to understand the people they work with. I know that they may feel pressured by the Directorates, but unless they are sensitive to the people that create the school environment, the members of staff will not be happy and delivery will suffer. They need to be sensitive to our needs, to our concerns, to the challenges and fears that we may be facing, and to the problems that we have to live with when dealing with the current challenges and fears. (T6, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

A Primary school teacher added that:

A HoS has to be a good listener and accept suggestions on how goals and visions can be achieved. I am aware that the Head has responsibilities, and is accountable to his/her superiors and the parents. However, the manner in which certain Heads communicated with the teachers appeared to be quasi-autocratic. (T6, Pri., College One, Ph1)

The study also made evident that creating relationships was also highly dependent on the degree of trust that existed. Overall, interviewed teachers and policy-makers highlighted the significance of trust and interpersonal skills, in their accounts and considered them central to the relationship that the HoS established with the school practitioners and the wider community. They believed that good working relationships influenced the success or failure of the educational goals of the school community. They concurred that interactions are impacted by personalities and the perception of individuals. A Primary school teacher argued:

When Heads consider our requests and appreciate our work, we feel more motivated. The school climate is directly associated with the Head's communication effectiveness. Some Heads must also use more tact and diplomacy when handling disagreements among members of staff. (T8, Pri., College One, Ph1)

A number of teacher interviewees added that when their HoS dealt with the modus operandi of the school they seemed to lack the right approach when dealing with others and managing the school. They believed that as a result, collaboration with their HoS suffered. One Primary school teacher's statement seemed to surmise what a good number of teachers felt:

People are at the heart of schools and school leaders have to deal with people. HoS will succeed in empowering teachers to sustain their vision for the school if they acknowledge that they operate in a human environment. Very often some Heads tend to forget the human factor and rather than fostering a collaborative and collegial way of working, they use their authoritative position and enforce. So it is a case of top-down approach, which hinders every form of collaboration. (T9, Pri., College One, Ph1)

Conversely, HoS claimed that they were always ready to listen, discuss and employ the distributed leadership model. The shared response was that they believed in the competences and professionalism of their staff, and treated people with respect. One Head of Primary School succinctly argued:

We give importance to communication, motivation and creativity. However, we cannot forget that as leaders of schools, our superiors expect us to deliver. So we try to maintain a balance between demanding and discussing good quality teaching by teachers. So at times we need to approach a situation with a particularly authoritative stance. When we do this some seem to interpret our actions as lacking tact, diplomacy and understanding. However, one cannot generalise. We adapt to the situation that arises. (HoS8, Pri., College One, Ph1)

### *3. Leadership styles*

#### *a. Collegial leadership*

The data made evident that policy-makers and the College Principal wanted the HoS to take on board the practice of collegial leadership. By and large, they said that, bearing in mind the changes Maltese education was going through, this style of leadership should be grounded in respect, sharing, understanding, cooperation and empathy. One policy maker argued:

Collaboration is central to the Education (Amendment) Act, 2006. Collegial leadership, a ripple effect of collaboration, is characterised by shared-decision making. Studies and even experience have shown that this style of leadership fosters teamwork and motivates others through participation and recognition of the worth of each person. Our notions of what leadership is have to change, if we are to succeed in our objective of transforming the Maltese Education system and make it globally compatible for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We have to utilise the full potential of leadership. (PM2, Ph1)

The Principal's discourse corroborated the above policy maker's argument:

HoS need to create a win-win situation ensuring that all members of staff move beyond compromise so that they feel they can contribute to the school's improvement. This can be nurtured through good, open and sincere communication. Heads can achieve this if they take time to reflect and nourish their physical, mental and emotional self. (P1, College One, Ph1)

Additionally, some interviewed teachers highlighted the point that school leaders needed to strive harder in building a team culture, fostering and sustaining collegiality and building a relationship of trust. They believed that this would establish the fitting atmosphere, which should foster productive collegiality in the school. As one Primary school teacher argued:

We still seem to be struggling to share our territory, our resources and expertise. Heads need to work harder to inject the new culture of collaboration and collegiality. More serious reflection and planning will pave the way for a steadfast commitment towards building and reinforcing,



horizontally and vertically, a culture of collegial and distributed leadership. (T10, Pri., College One, Ph1)

Policy-makers and the Principal maintained that all leaders, particularly Heads and teachers, immersed in the current reform and committed to sustain its process could be considered to be transformational in style. The Principal of College One persuasively maintained:

When Heads and teachers work together to build a common interest, to sustain a common vision they are exhibiting what Sergiovanni refers to as **transformational leadership** (interviewee's emphasis). Transformational leadership nurtures a culture of support and empowerment. Consequently teachers will feel empowered and consider themselves as participants in the reform. (P1, College One, Ph1)

*b. Staff oriented leadership*

The findings highlighted a staff oriented style of leadership, which interviewed HoS thought would assist them in managing the current and future reform related challenges. Heads spoke about the functions of giving direction, offering support and applying influence. Many of them concurred that transforming the mind set of their staff would help the 2006 Education reform gain currency. However, they also added that their headship experience made them aware that it would not be without tension. The Head of a J.L. and Secondary school argued:

It will not be easy to transform the current mind set of the teachers, particularly because of the inherent culture of teaching alone for so long. I admit that we need to motivate and influence others but then motivation is a delicate issue that needs to be handled with care. Unfortunately there is the danger that some interpret our work as politically motivated because we will be implementing centrally-determined policies. When formulating school plans and implementing policies, we have to demonstrate to our staff that they come first at all times. True, we are accountable to the government, who is our employer, and have to respond to the 'top-down' demands, but we will not forget our teaching staff and their needs. We have to show them that we are there to work **with them** (interviewee's emphasis). (HoS2, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

*c. Shared leadership*

The data showed that the majority of interviewed teachers highlighted the shared form of leadership style in their narratives. They wanted their Heads to adopt a model and structure that was less bureaucratic and less individual centred. Teachers hoped that school leaders would be disposed towards more consultation and collaboration with their teachers, which would mean a shared leadership style. They acquiesced that experiencing and living shared leadership in Maltese schools would be achieved when members of staff in schools are given roles and leaders of schools provide them with proper and effective support structures. As one Primary school teacher maintained:

Heads of School need to understand that they can no longer lead schools alone in the current times that are permeated by challenges and riddled with tension. Our voice and expertise are essential if we truly want to improve teaching and learning, and sustain the reform. (T8, Pri., College One, Ph1)

The vision of teachers was to be part of a more shared leadership, where Heads consult and discuss with teachers any foreseeable decisions that would affect them, school policy and improvement. The teachers' perception about the reality of the situation can be condensed into what one J.L. and Secondary school teacher stated:

We teachers are experiencing a lot of anxiety about what the future might hold. In theory and on paper one can say a lot. However, it is the actual praxis that counts and the reality is that the system is still 'top-down'. We hear the terms shared and distributed leadership being thrown about and wanting us to believe that this culture is being adopted as one of the new educational policies, but reality indicates otherwise. This makes us believe that although the contents of the law augur for a decentralised and distributed leadership culture, yet matters are different and we believe that the system will remain the same, **centralised** (interviewee's emphasis). The only difference now is that there is a Principal substituting the Directorates. (T6, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

Another J.L. and Secondary school teacher argued:

If we truly want to transform our schools into learning communities, we have to work and learn together as active leaders. It is a fact that teachers are by design leaders within their classrooms, but they must be given the space to be leaders beyond the classroom. It is also true that there are teacher leaders; such as librarians, guidance teachers etc. However, engaging in reflection and decision making within our schools gives us a stronger sense of belonging. Shared leadership must be given the opportunity to exist. Principals and Heads of school must embrace the democratic value of shared leadership and create opportunities for other forms of participative leadership to take place. (T5, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

#### *4. Concerns and challenges*

In the year 2006 Malta embarked on the transformational journey of the Maltese Education system generating a number of challenges. Consequently this study identified five major challenges:

- the importance of motivation as the critical force to the reform;
- the growing demands on headship;
- the anxiety teachers were facing;
- the college micro-politics;
- the dominant influence of the Union.

##### *a. Motivating others*

Evidence in the research pointed to the challenges that the leaders of the College and the schools foresaw in leading their members of staff as Maltese education embarked on a journey of reforms and change. They all concurred that since the envisaged changes would first and foremost challenge the status quo of all educators, the greatest challenge would be leading others to acknowledge that they required a shift in mind-set, beliefs and practices. As one policy-maker argued:

Leaders of colleges and schools need to make their subordinates feel that without their active role in the process of change, change will not be possible. They need to motivate more participative attitudes. We acknowledge that this is not going to be without tension. Consequently, college and school leaders need to maintain a delicate balance between giving teachers more responsibility and retaining their headship authority. To create a shared leadership at school level the Heads must become staff developers. (PM1, Ph1)

*b. Overloaded management role*

A provision in the Education Act addresses the issue of mentoring but ironically, the realities present a different picture altogether. One particular Head of J.L. and Secondary school, who seemed to voice the opinion of almost all the Heads of College One, claimed that:

We are so inundated by emails, circulars, tasks by different Service Managers and Directors, and requests for information, which would have already been passed on to other sections of the Education Directorates, that we do not have the time to mentor our teachers. (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

Almost all the interviewed Heads claimed that their managerial responsibilities had increased, consequently hindering them from fulfilling their leadership roles, which they thought could reinforce and enrich the relationship with their staff (for instance undertaking observation sessions in the classrooms and mentoring). This situation worried them. A worried Head of one Primary school stated:

I feel that I am not performing well, as a Head, because I do not visit the classes as much as I would want to. The way the role of the Head of School has materialized is not giving us enough space and time for class visits. One demanding and time consuming responsibility is overseeing a budget and seeing how you are going to economize. So you spend a lot of time phoning and trying to negotiate the best price and this takes time. (HoS9, Pri., College One, Ph1)

Some other HoS added that the paper work had increased and as a result, even though they now had Assistant Heads to help them, they still could not find the time to mentor and monitor teachers. One annoyed Head of another Primary school retorted:

When the building needs repairs and maintenance I still have to oversee that the work is done well, even though there is supposed to be a College Precinct's Officer in charge. But one person is not enough for the whole college. Furthermore, apart from supervising the work, I have to send feedback to the Precinct's officer to give him feedback about the works. This means that the mentoring and monitoring that we are expected to do is restricted. (HoS7, Pri., College One, Ph1)

*c. Teachers' anxiety*

The challenges precipitated by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) made evident by the recorded stories, pointed to an overall perception of interviewed Heads. They acknowledged that many of the teachers in their school were experiencing fear, anxiety and panic because of all the changes and adaptations they were expected to take on board. They were aware that managing people undergoing these experiences needed immediate attention. Most of the Heads acknowledged that because of the developing scenarios, because of the reforms and the triggered changes, they too needed the support and understanding of the education authorities. One Head of Primary school admitted:

All these on-going reforms and changes are overwhelming us, let alone the teachers. We need the Directorates' understanding and even continuous support to deal with the frame of mind of the staff to help them meet these changes. (HoS10, Pri., College One, Ph1)

Interviewed teachers agreed that responsible school leaders could help teachers adopt and support change. This could be achieved by doing what one J.L. and Secondary school teacher maintained:

Our Heads of School need to protect us teachers and set the pace for change that respects our rhythm. We need our Heads to provide us with as much relevant information as possible about the change and how it will impact our teaching so that we can take it on board. We need to know what is expected of us as the change is implemented. (T3, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

*d. The college micro-politics*

The findings indicated that the sub-theme of the college micro-politics was overshadowed with disappointment. While overall, the Heads of College One strongly acknowledged the dedicated and excellent leadership of quality and commitment exercised by the Principal; the stories of a substantial few were characterised by a certain degree of disgruntlement. They felt that decentralisation of leadership roles was at best artificial. HoS felt that their superiors were living in an ivory tower. They felt that when the policy-makers created the new post of College Principal they were crafting another notch in the administrative hierarchy. They said that in many instances the Central Authorities were manifested in the Principal. HoS claimed that they had limited authority because they had to refer everything to the Principal for approval. They maintained that the divide between theory and the current praxis of the shared and distributed educational leadership is far and wide. One displeased Head of Primary school asserted:

I and some of my peers feel threatened by what we perceive as impositions by the College Principals. There should be a more defined definition of roles. The College Principals must work towards achieving desirable relationships. They need to involve the Heads when drawing up the Council of Heads agenda and not come to the meeting with a prescriptive schedule which would probably have been based on decisions taken during the monthly meetings that the Principals have with the Director Generals and Directors. (HoS11, Pri., College One, Ph1)

One Head of a J.L. and Secondary School argued:

The College Principals need to put a stop to the growing practice of the parents reporting to the Principal if they feel disgruntled about something, even insignificant issues. The old practice of parents going to the Director General or the Permanent Secretary, as was happening prior to 2005, is happening with the Principals. The Principals need to educate these parents and tell them that if they have any school related problem they should take it up with the Head of School. The Principals should come in if the issue is very serious and even then, the Principals should investigate before telling the parents that the issue will be resolved. (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

*e. Having a highly unionized State*

The findings of the study showed that one of the primary concerns of policy-makers highlighted the notable monopoly that the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) had in the education sector. The policy-makers argued that the local educators had strong Union protection and finalizing an agreement between the MUT and the Government was not going to be easy, particularly when the Union had taken offence because of the lack of consultation with stakeholders. The policy-makers acknowledged that the Union, in 2005 had stated that those who could have really contributed (teachers, subject coordinators and other similar teaching personnel) to the proposed changes in the education system were not consulted. One policy maker admitted:

This may have been an oversight on our part, but I believe that the Unions have other roles to play. I am not saying that the Union should not consider the welfare of its members. However, taking cognizance of the National interest, the Union needs to work with us on the professional development of the stakeholders. We need the Union to sit down with us to discuss issues that are directed towards the professional development of all school practitioners and then we move on to the financial package. (PM3, Ph1)

#### ***5.2.4 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Governance and Governing***

The data collected from three different sources (see section 5.0) highlighted the implications, which the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working would have on educational governance and governing of the institutions involved. These implications are presented in a number of sub-themes:

- understanding educational governance and governing;
- the reorganised structures of the governing bodies of Maltese education;
- understanding shifts in decision-making;
- the current governance and governing model in colleges and schools;
- work overload;
- concerns and issues.

##### ***1. Understanding educational governance and governing***

The data that emerged provided noteworthy findings around the participants' understanding and opinion of educational governance and governing. It also offered an insight into the existing diversity

and the various views that the participants held, and helped me identify the presence of a core set of views around the understanding of this secondary theme.

On a general note, the respondents talked about superiors, authority and a system framework that was required for the running of an institution. The study showed concurrence about the challenges that were linked to governance and governing, and that governing an institution demanded maturity. Many claimed that one of the requisites of good governance and governing was neither having total control nor imposing on your subordinates one's responsibility that being a leader should have undertaken. All respondents also concurred that governing could be the remit of one individual or a Board. Finally, all agreed that new models of governance and governing of local schools and colleges should improve of the governance and governing structures of Maltese Colleges.

## *2. The reorganised structures of the governing bodies of Maltese education*

The findings revealed the interviewees' perceptions about the statutory structures of governance and governing as written in the Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). Overall, the stories centred mainly on the personnel at the different levels of the education structure, namely at the Directorates, the Colleges and the respective schools.

The study made evident that the post-reform style of educational governance and governing was impacting the Principals and HoS, who claimed that they were experiencing a demanding phase in their career. They claimed that certain articles of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) underpinned a culture change in decision-making. The Maltese Government sought to respond to the need to adopt a more collaborative and collegial culture that would bring about a paradigm shift in Maltese educational governance and governing. Consequently, they were conscious of a re-culturing and restructuring process at the heart of the current reforms.

The findings made evident that the interviewed Principal and HoS showed good insight into the established governance structures at the Directorates. They were cognisant of the on-going restructuring of the Education Division (as it was locally known). Their stories suggested consensus on the notion that the restructuring would strengthen the Directorates and also sustain the process of decentralisation. They were knowledgeable that the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) unequivocally maintained that:

Without prejudice to the provisions of this Act, the executive management, the Administration and the administrative control of the officers and employees of the Directorates shall be the responsibility of the Directors General. (Laws of Malta, 2006, Part II, Article 15, p.635)

They were also familiar with the framework of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) and that it made provisions for the qualification of the Directorates' new role and the new model of governance within the Directorate.

The findings also showed that teachers were familiar with the hierarchical model of Maltese schools in which one finds an established prescribed structure: a Head of School, a number of assistant heads (members of the SMT of the school), subject coordinators, teachers and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). They also knew that the leaders of the Colleges and schools were individuals with assigned responsibilities.

*a. The two directorates*

The Principal and Heads of School were cognisant of the fact that the Central Authority was now divided between two Directorates (the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education – DQSE, and the Directorate for Educational Services – DES) and that the intended objective was to have Maltese Education managed better. Where in the past everything was controlled by one Director General, now the ‘regulator’ (DQSE) worked independently of the ‘employer’ (DES). The major implication behind this change was pointed out by the Minister when he stated:

Separating the ‘employer’ from the ‘regulator’ would eliminate any conflict of interest that might have arose in the past because of the state of affairs of having one Director General wearing two hats. Schools would be directly supported by the DES whereas the DQSE would have the responsibility of setting standards that would ensure quality education for all. One of the responsibilities of the DQSE would be to carry out external audits. (Minister1, Ph1).

*b. The colleges*

The findings showed that the Principal and Heads were familiar with the established governance arrangements of each college as sanctioned in the Act. The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) made provisions for:

- a consultative College Board;
- a College Principal, as the Chief Executive Officer of the College, who was accountable to the College Board;
- a Council of Heads, formed by the Heads of all the Primary and Secondary schools within the college, which was accountable to the Principal.

It emerged that these developments influenced the opinions of the various stakeholders and how they perceived their own position and the new demands.

*3. Understanding shifts in decision-making*

Having teachers not conversant with the administrative structure of the Directorates and the Colleges (because of lack of consultation) emerged as one of many sub-themes of the study. The teachers’ narratives revealed that teachers were not provided with the relevant information, so crucial for the commitment and support of the reform. The interviewees’ perception could be condensed into what one Primary school teacher stated very strongly:

As far as I am concerned, and I think I speak for many other teachers, **we have not been given enough information** (interviewee’s emphasis) about the administrative structure of the college or the Directorates. I know that the Heads of schools meet together with the Principal, but when and how often, I have no idea. Nor do I know what they discuss. We feel that one of the topics on the agenda for the Staff Development meeting organised by the College principal once a term for all the Primary school teachers should be providing the missing information about the administrative structures of the directorates and the colleges. We cannot suggest it because the agenda of

the meeting is not prepared by the teachers, but by the Principal. I believe **we deserve to be given the relevant information** (interviewee's emphasis) if we are expected to support and commit ourselves to the reforms. (T15, Pri., College One, Ph1)

A J.L. and Secondary school teacher, while corroborating the previous claim added:

Teachers should have been given the whole spectrum of the system, its administrative structure and the implications of the reform. We teachers may be more concerned with what is directly related to the classroom rather than with the hierarchical and administrative structure that was created by the College reform. Maybe I, like my peers, was not inclined to ask because we felt that we were not consulted well. (T3, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

The findings also presented the respondents' stance vis-à-vis the missing College Board that was one of the provisions of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). Interviewed teachers thought that the College Board would be an important link in the governing hierarchy of the college structure, since it would include individuals from the wider community. Having such a statutory Board missing was considered to be rather perplexing. Another J.L. and Secondary school teacher expressed concern:

What I find hard to accept is the fact that we have embarked on a very challenging reform that needs a culture change and one important tier in the governing structure is missing. The question I ask is: Is it missing because it is not that important to the reform? If that is the case, then why bother to make it a statutory provision? **Teachers feel that they have been left in the dark and this is affecting the overall attitude of the teachers towards the reform** (interviewee's emphasis). (T4, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

#### *4. The current governance and governing model in colleges and schools*

The findings revealed the opinion of the HoS and the teachers regarding the sub-theme of the current governance and governing model of the local colleges and schools. Overall, it emerged that the same 'top-down' model that existed pre-2006, was still in place. The Heads acquiesced that the Principal was simply substituting and representing the Directorates. Some of them even claimed that in certain cases the Principal had no jurisdiction and had to refer the matter to the Directorates.

The statement by one particular Head of Primary school seemed to voice the feelings of other peers about the possibility of power struggle, as Heads might have felt threatened by what they perceived as impositions by the College Principal:

Many of us feel threatened by the College Principal because there is no clear definition of our roles. At times any communication within the College still needs to be sent to the Principal and then disseminated by the Principal, who retains control of the communication. The majority feel that parameters and responsibilities for both the Principals and the Heads of School should be clearly established. (Acting HoS13, Pri., College One, Ph1)



Hence, the issue of power, control and identity surfaced as a critical point of concern, especially for HoS and other educators functioning at the lower level, because of the lack of clarity around boundaries.

### *5. Work overload*

The data made apparent the discontent of the Heads central to their work overload. They claimed that the reform and the new structure of governance instituted within the Directorates and the Colleges had a ripple effect in that it increased their workload. Such an increase curtailed their time to carry out mentoring exercises central to the teaching and learning process. As the Head of a J.L. and Secondary school asserted:

We feel that the amount of paper work and the administrative matters that we have to deal with every day have impeded us from giving greater importance and attention to those issues directly linked to the curriculum. This brings on a sense of failing constantly because what is crucial is being given very little attention. (HoS2, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

The findings continued to show that most of the interviewed Heads, whilst recognising this tension, also concurred that the demands on their work were at times excessive, particularly because of the need to complete an increasing number of tasks frequently dealing with paper work. One Head of Primary school stated:

What I find unacceptable is that we have to respond to a great range of demands, which means collecting and sending the same information over and over again to different directors. It seems that the various directors do not communicate among themselves for the same information. Besides the paper work for the Director Generals, we have to supply information for Parliamentary Questions about our schools. Not only does all this take time but you have to deal with them **asap** (interviewee's emphasis). (HoS3, Pri., College One, Ph1)

### *6. Concerns and issues*

#### *a. The 'top-down' approach*

The findings of the study identified the incidence of centralisation as a central sub-theme in the concerns of school leaders and teachers. The majority of such interviewees held that although Maltese education was undergoing the current innovative reforms, decentralisation seemed to be limited because of certain praxis. One Head of a J.L. and Secondary school claimed:

The running of the Education system is still controlled by the Directorates, because they still have the statutory right to establish the National Curriculum, a detailed policy outlining the subjects that are taught in schools, class sizes, the aims of the educational system and how these should be achieved. It also has full control over recruitment, deploying, discipline and promoting members of staff. (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

#### *b. Lack of consultation*

##### *i. Lack of consultation with the Heads of School*

The research highlighted the perception of the HoS about the lack of consultation between them and the Principal, making it an important sub-theme. Heads of School expressed concerns about ‘The Education Leaders Council’ (ELC), an ad hoc and non-statutory committee set up to discuss policy issues and other matters at College level. The Heads considered the workings of this committee an exemplar of the ‘top-down’ traditional practice. It also emerged from the study that central to the ELC the Heads of School had relevant information about:

- the composition of the ELC (the two Director Generals, the Directors within the two directorates and the Principals of the Colleges);
- its meetings’ timeframe (the committee met once a month);
- its function (served as a forum for director generals, directors and principals to learn about and reflect on their role in leading a supposedly decentralised education system;
- its remit (discussed policies and issues on both the national and college level).

Consequently, the Heads believed that the ELC could play a significant role in the governance of the colleges. However, it became apparent that since the Principal did not discuss with the Heads issues that concerned the college and which could be taken to the ELC forums, they felt critical of the ELC because they felt left out from such important discussions. One disgruntled Head of a J.L. and Secondary school stated:

How can we move forward when we Heads do not have a voice on a consortium that formulates policies for the schools that we lead? When we meet in the Council of Heads, the Principal brings to the forum new policies that have been decided at the ELC level. We are issued with directives which the ELC feels is needed and for which there has not been any consultation with the stakeholders. (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

HoS expressed their concern about their limited involvement in the decision making process of matters concerning College One. Finally, teachers also felt that their involvement in the decision making process, on matters that were central to the school, was rather insignificant. They believed they could offer more.

#### *ii. Lack of consultation with the teachers*

The findings underlined the lack of consultation by the HoS with the teachers. Teachers complained that the current practice did not seem to reinforce the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working and its implications for shared governance. Many of the teachers claimed that the new form of collaboration fostered by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) would help to sustain the new model of shared governance as proposed for the Colleges. They argued that unfortunately the system was still very much top heavy, particularly when respective leaders (Director Generals, Principals and HoS) were dictating what had to be done, rather than discussing.

The teachers added that the Heads had a monthly CCoH meeting led by the College Principal. They presumed that Heads had a voice in discussions and decision-making at College level because they thought that these council meetings were places where school leaders met to discuss common issues and concerns, and to reflect on their collective work. However, teachers were critical of the fact that the Head, before attending a CCoH meeting, rarely discussed issues and asked for suggestions on matters central to their school. Consequently, they felt ignored when they should have been consulted

since they knew first-hand the challenges and difficulties of the school. One Primary school teacher pointed out:

We teachers do not seem to have a voice in policies or plans that are proposed for our college, because the Head of School rarely consults the teachers before the monthly Council of Heads meeting. The agenda of those meetings does not include any of our suggestions, which we feel are needed for the school and our students. Who else can offer better ideas than the teachers who are the grassroots and the pulse of Maltese schools and Colleges? (T18, Pri., College One, Ph1)

Consequently, the findings highlighted issues about the lack of consultation that underlined implications for sustaining the reforms. Both the Heads of School and the teachers felt left out of important discussions and decision-taking.

### ***5.2.5 The Subsidiary Theme of Accountability Relationships***

Finally, the study made evident a number of sub-themes around the secondary theme of accountability relationships, namely:

- the understanding of accountability;
- how school networks endorsed collective accountability and what it meant feeling collectively accountable;
- the new way of working, where I addressed the new accountability structure and the decision making authority;
- the challenges and concerns around accountability.

#### ***1. Understanding accountability***

The findings showed that there was consensus among respondents who identified a strong link between governance and accountability. They held that since governance was synonymous with the politics of direction in its widest sense (that is, where a country or any institution, for that matter, was aiming to reach), this made the governing stakeholders part of the accountability equation of their institution.

The Minister of Education, Youth and Employment (MEYE) recognising the importance of accountability in the educational journey of the Maltese student stated:

When I was given the portfolio for the Ministry of Education I realised that it was crucial to find a formula to provide the best possible means to provide continuity on the child's educational journey and we find a source of **accountability** (interviewee's emphasis) for that journey. (Minister1, Ph1)

#### ***2. School networks endorsed collective accountability***

In the interview the Minister had remarked:

In 2002 I noted that Malta needed to establish school networks to give children and parents, continuity and accountability. (Minister1, Ph1)

In 2005, he identified collegiality and collaboration as central to the implementation of the reforms. All practitioners, whether Principals, Heads or teachers, had to embrace the new model of collaboration proposed in *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) because that way of working fostered collective accountability. The Minister had argued that the new approach to teaching and working collaboratively in Maltese State schools made all the school practitioners equally responsible for the child. It was no longer a question of the classroom or subject teacher or just the HoS that shouldered responsibility for the child's educational journey, but the whole school. The Minister argued that:

This innovative reform will mean a paradigm shift where schools with Heads and teachers who worked in a sort of state (alone) will now open up to work together. Good practice needs to be shared and passed on to others. School leaders and practitioners need to understand that they have to become collectively responsible for the educational journey of the child. (Minister1, Ph1)

His claim found justification in the discourse of the College Principal when he maintained that:

When more autonomy and educational responsibilities are given to the schools (that is the Heads and teachers), the school practitioners (whether leaders or teachers) will assume greater responsibility. If decentralisation will not remain just a lip service and schools are given more meaningful autonomy there will be increased collective accountability. (P1, College One, Ph1)

*a. Collective accountability*

The study showed that overall there was concurrence that educators were responsible for their work and that this responsibility had to be felt internally. They also concurred that being members of the same education institution, felt responsible for each other. Overall, interviewees believed that they (directorates, colleges and schools) needed to work together. All stakeholders had to feel responsible for one main objective; that is, helping every child to succeed and ensuring that every child matters. One Head of J.L. and Secondary School remarked that:

All those involved in the educational journey of the child, whether at the Centre or in the Colleges need to work together. The Centre and the schools need to move closer and work together to develop a culture of collective accountability. All stakeholders have to feel responsible for one common goal; that is, helping every child to succeed and ensuring that every child matters. (HoS1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

One teacher's observation, which seemed to capture the nature of other interviewees' remarks, highlighted the significance of collaboration and collegiality. She also remarked that the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working implications for accountability relationships. Although such collaboration preserved the current form of individual responsibility, at the same time it was fostering a new culture of collective accountability. One J.L. and Secondary school teacher argued:

Working collaboratively helps us become more responsible. Once we become responsible then we are all held accountable for things that we have participated in creating. (T1, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

The recorded narratives also helped me appreciate the concurrence among the College One interviewees around the opinion that the college reform brought with it a form of collective accountability because now they had to collaborate and work with each other. They all considered themselves members of a team working for a common goal and equally accountable for the success of the child.

### *3. A new way of working*

The study revealed consensus around the sub-theme of a new way of working. Overall, interviewees concurred that the college model provided a new model of working, which they thought demanded new approaches. As a result of reforms (more emphasis on mixed ability classes) interviewees presumed that new teaching approaches and methodologies had to be adopted. Many felt that it was going to be challenging adopting new methods and approaches of teaching. One Primary school teacher, who had always taught a 6A class and now, had to start teaching a mixed ability class, stated:

It will be very challenging seeking help from my peers in a specific area. But, accountability demands that I be honest about the limitations in my practice and be bold enough to seek assistance and learn. (T20, Pri., College One, Ph1)

#### *a. A new accountability framework*

It emerged from the findings that interviewees (Principals, school leaders and teachers) maintained that in the past it was the prerogative of HoS to group students in classes. This was based on the information the Heads of Primary schools collected from the respective teachers, and in the Secondary sector the information was collected by the subject coordinator after consultation with the teachers. Student classification was then based on their academic performance in the school examinations. After the publication of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) the half-yearly examination papers started being prepared by a group of teachers representing all the schools of the college. However, the annual paper remained the prerogative of DQSE. One Head of J.L. and Secondary school contended that:

Since the half-yearly exam paper is the product of all the teachers of the College, the teachers are all and equally accountable for that paper. The reform has created what can be referred to as collective responsibility. We are all equally accountable. (HoS2, J.L. & Sec., College One, Ph1)

#### *b. Decision-making authority*

The study confirmed that for many of the interviewees the current decentralisation process was rather limited and limiting. Overall, interviewees felt that the Maltese Education system was still top-heavy and that certain decisions were still the domain of Directorates. Ironically, one policy maker argued that it was unfair to hold the schools accountable and expect Heads and teachers to assume greater responsibilities for the content, organisation and monitoring of the learning process, when decision-taking was still primarily the domain of the Directorates. He argued that:

There should be discussions on how one should move towards a balanced system that allows for particular centralised practices while allowing the **appropriate** (interviewee's emphasis) latitude for schools to make a difference. Establishing what is appropriate is a central issue while allowing for such flexibility that is necessary for schools to make desired improvements as demands and needs change over time. (PM2, Ph1)

The same policy maker added that the colleges, especially in the initial phases of this reform process, needed adequate support services. Such level of support can be reviewed when more personnel is allocated to work within the colleges and for the schools.

The stories of certain Heads of School corroborated the above. They maintained that they still saw formal authority emanating from the Directorates. The Heads asserted that they considered themselves nothing less than a rubber stamp because they were expected to ensure that mandates, policies and procedures, decided at ELC level, were implemented. They argued that whilst they were witnessing a move towards increased accountability at College/school level, the decentralisation of decision-making had not yet reached the school level. The important decisions seemed to be taking place at ELC level and then the College Principals were transferring and implementing policy decisions within their respective Colleges.

#### *4. Challenges and concerns*

Again, the data showed the interviewees' perception around the sub-theme of concerns and challenges. Principal and HoS acknowledged that facilitating, encouraging and sustaining a model of collective accountability may very well be challenging. They thought that because of the inherent practice of teaching alone and that change and reforms do not exist in a vacuum but in a context, in which the human dynamics are complex and play a defining role, the change would not be without tension. They thought that school practitioners needed to find ways to nurture a sense of trust among them; the kind of trust that would create an atmosphere in which they felt comfortable collaborating with each other. Teachers, in particular, needed to be able to accept critical evaluation of their practice and realise that solitary teaching in a classroom lent itself to the feeling that this is my domain and counteracts collaboration. The College One Principal argued:

We need to realise that at the end of the day we all want the same thing – the best for our students, who deserve a climate in which members of staff respect and trust each other enough to accept criticism. School practitioners need to stop being apprehensive to evaluate each other's decisions for doing things in a certain way or to critically evaluate our teaching styles. (P1, College One, Ph1)

The Principal sensibly added that the main challenge facing school members was to adhere to the collective decision rather than holding on to their own ideas. Consensus needed to become a central component of school life. One particular policy maker did not mince words. He was categorical in his opinion about the current criteria of holding schools and their leaders accountable. She claimed:

If the directorates dictate through centralised funding systems or detailed instructional policies what schools should do, or if they micromanage school leaders, they then have a conflict of interest if they attempt to audit or hold school leaders accountable. In effect, the directorates would be auditing

their own decisions. If instructional decisions were in the hands of the schools, then the DQSE would be justified in auditing the schools and holding them accountable. (PM1, Ph1)

### ***5.2.6 An overview of the findings that emerged in Phase One***

The context of this brief overview are the findings of Phase One based on the review of official documents, observing CCoH meetings and interviewees' narratives as they lived through the experience of the ongoing reforms that were meant to address the laudable goal of helping all students to succeed. Furthermore the interviewees were of different ages, at different stages in their careers, had passed through distinct experiences and were working in different contexts.

The findings compounded by the developing local scenario showed clearly that the ongoing reform and changes being implemented led to reactions. These findings made evident a rather interesting representation of the diverse notions, stances and opinions of the interviewees and underlined the benefits, challenges, issues and concerns of the interviewees and their peers. They presented a significant and varied perspective of the four key themes and the sub-themes that emerged.

#### ***1. Emergent themes***

While recognizing the limitations of this overview of the first phase of the study since it presents the narratives of a selected cohort from one of four colleges, it does have the possibility of identifying a number of themes and sub-themes, which emerge from issues around official documents, from observation sessions of CCoH meetings and from the recorded narratives. In sum, the key findings from this first stage of the research, grouped under the four key themes of the study, are presented below:

##### ***a. Networking and collaboration***

The research showed the evidence of a number of sub-themes central to the understanding of the nature of the primary theme of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working by individual schools. It emerged that there was a pre-existing history of informal intra-and inter-school collaboration. Overall, interviewees thought that having intra- and inter-school collaboration was crucial for the sustainability of the reforms, because it fostered dialogue, intra- and inter-school joint-working, collegiality, sharing of good practice and learning from one another. The data showed that collaboration underlined the concept of 'togetherness' (T22, Pri., College One, Ph1), which materialised into combined energy and also underlined the diversity dimension. However, the current collaborative and collegial model brought diverse opposing reactions, showing that engaging in intra- and inter-school collaboration was not without tension and challenges. These challenges centred on the sub-themes of commitment, transforming the isolationist traditional model and tackling the issues of identity and uniqueness.

##### ***b. Educational leadership and management***

Important sub-themes around the implications that the new model of collaboration in a policy context would have for educational leadership and management of the institutions involved, emerged from the study. The study highlighted the interviewees' perceptions around the dimension of the roles and responsibilities of leaders; mainly leadership skills change agency, building trust, demonstrating the right leadership audacity; being visionary and able to forge and lead others in sustaining intra- and inter-school relationships. The findings also pointed to leadership styles; particularly collegial, staff oriented and shared leadership. The concerns and challenges of the diverse group of interviewees, around this secondary theme, were evident and appeared to address five seemingly central issues:

motivating others; having an overloaded management role; teachers' anxiety; the college micro-politics and having a highly unionized State.

*c. Educational governance and governing*

The study also made evident a diverse selection of significant sub-themes central to the implications that the new model of collaboration in a policy context would have for the secondary theme of governance and governing. There emerged a core set of views around the understanding of this secondary theme. It also showed that the interviewees, except for the majority of teachers, were familiar with the new governing structures of the two directorates and the colleges. Consequently, the data around the sub-theme of understanding shifts in decision making made evident the teachers' dissatisfaction for not being provided with useful information that the Principals and Heads of School received, whilst the missing College Board perplexed many. Regarding the sub-theme of the current governance and governing model within the colleges, both Heads and teachers thought that it was still similar to the pre-2006 top-down model. Consequently there was tension around governance and governing. The data once again showed the inference of tension among the Heads who felt that the ongoing reforms were increasing their workload and impacting their leadership. The findings underlined various concerns, mainly the still-predominant top-heavy approach and the lack of consultation. Both Heads and teachers criticised their immediate superiors for not keeping to the spirit of the reform.

*d. Accountability relationships*

The research made evident a diverse selection of significant sub-themes central to the implications that the new model of collaboration in a policy context would have for the secondary theme of accountability relationships. Considering the secondary theme of accountability relationships, the study showed that across the group of interviewees there was an understanding of the need to be accountable and that the model of collaboration endorsed collective accountability. Other sub-themes that emerged around that of accountability relationships included: a new way of accountability structure and that the decision-making authority needed revisiting. The findings also highlighted concerns and challenges and showed that facilitating, encouraging and sustaining a model of collective accountability would not be without tension.

Generally speaking, the data collected from College One showed there was consensus that one had to give the reform time to gain ground, particularly when the reform was still in its embryonic stage. Consequently, one needed to appreciate that reforms fostered change and a new way of working that would impact their stakeholders because of the benefits and challenges that materialized. Accordingly, the study revealed that almost all interviewees agreed that educators and stakeholders had to give the reform a chance to work.

Finally, considering the larger picture of the Phase One data it emerged that the future of the reform appeared promising, particularly when many of the interviewees claimed that they considered the college reform a celebration of diversity because all the schools had been given a voice, especially small schools. However, the findings also showed that all educators, whether at the Centre, Colleges or in schools needed to work harder to overcome the challenges, and the many issues and concerns that the reform was creating. All sides had to work harder so that inter- and intra-school collaboration could be facilitated and the provisions of the law could be implemented.



## 5.3 Phase Two

### 5.3.1 Case Studies of Three Other Colleges and Revisiting College One

In this section of the chapter, I present the wide-ranging findings that emerged from the data (interviews, observation of CCoH meetings and reviewing official documents) collected between February 2009 and end of 2010. In Phase Two, the selected cohort of interviewees had the same status as those of Phase One (Minister, Policy -makers, Principals, HoS and teachers). Whilst all the Principals and the HoS of all the Primary and Secondary schools of the four Colleges were interviewed, a sample of Primary school teachers and a sample of Secondary school teachers were selected from each of the three Colleges using the convenience and purposive sampling methods. The Phase One sample of teachers was revisited in Phase Two. The findings I present in this section of the Chapter emerged from a large set of narrative accounts, observation sessions and official documents. When collecting the interview data I adopted the same semi-structured interview technique, same style, same interview schedule and procedure that I used in Phase One. The interviewees' stories again provided me with some significant sub-themes, some similar to those that emerged in Phase One, and other new sub-themes that continued to underline the four key themes of the study.

The contextual structure of the schools, classification of students and the composition of the teaching body pertaining to the three colleges (in place by October 2008) studied in Phase Two, can be identified with those of College One (section 5.1). A contextual overview of the four colleges follows:

- a number of coeducational state primary schools each housing one coeducational kindergarten centre;
- the number of primary schools per college ranged from 5 to 7 schools;
- two of the three colleges had a primary school A and a primary school B. Pupils in School A attended Year 1 to Year 3 classes. The intake of students for School B attended Years 4 to Year 6 classes;
- all Primary schools had a Head of School except two schools that had an Acting Head of School;
- the schools all had one to two Assistant Heads. The number of Assistant Heads was determined by the size of the school population;
- the student population of the primary schools in the four studied colleges in this phase ranged from 1024 to 1871. The student population of the secondary schools in Phase Two of the research varied from 1516 to 1852;
- all three Colleges in the research had separate school buildings for the old 'grammar' school-type Junior Lyceum;
- in College One, Junior Lyceum and Secondary level students were housed in the same building.

#### *1. Demographic data of the four colleges in Phase Two*

College One (Revisited, scholastic year 2009 - 2010)

- 11 coeducational Kindergarten centres housed in primary school grounds;
- 11 coeducational state Primary schools;
- 2 Area Secondary schools (1 for boys and 1 for girls);
- 2 'grammar' school-type Junior Lyceums (1 for boys and 1 for girls). The Junior Lyceum cohorts of students were still housed in the same building as those attending Area Secondary;
- a student population of 3105 (Kindergarten to Form 5);

- 209 Primary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of School to teachers (there were 9 Heads, 2 Acting Heads, 10 Assistant Heads, 84 Teachers, and 104 other educators – Kindergarten Assistants and LSAs);
- 270 Secondary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of School to Teachers, which included 2 Heads, 8 Assistant Heads, 4 HODs, 200 Teachers, and 56 educators – instructors and LSAs).

#### College Five (Scholastic year 2009-2010)

- 5 coeducational kindergarten centres housed in primary school grounds;
- 5 coeducational state primary schools;
- 1 ‘grammar’ school-type Junior Lyceum State schools exclusively for girls;
- 2 Boys’ Secondary schools; (1 of the boys’ secondary catered also for a cohort of Junior Lyceum students who were accommodated in the same building).
- A school population of 3988 pupils & students (ranging from Kindergarten to Form 5)
- 212 Primary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of School to Teachers. Amongst them there were 4 Heads, 1 Acting Head, 14 Assistant Heads, 72 Teachers, and 121 educators, ranging from instructors to support teachers;
- 260 Secondary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of School to Teachers, which included 3 Heads, 10 Assistant Heads, 20 HOD, 237 Teachers, and 46 educators, ranging from instructors to support teachers.

#### College Six (Scholastic year 2009-2010)

- 5 coeducational kindergarten centres housed in primary school grounds;
- 6 coeducational state primary schools; (In one town there was a Primary School A – Years 1, 2 & 3, and a Primary School B – Years 4, 5 & 6);
- 1 Girls’ ‘grammar’ school-type Junior Lyceum and 1 Boys’ ‘grammar’ school-type Junior Lyceum;
- 1 Girls’ Secondary school and 1 Boys’ Secondary school;
- 177 Primary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of school to Teachers. Amongst them there were 6 Heads, 9 Assistant Heads, 54 teachers, and 108 educators, ranging from instructors to support teachers;
- 278 Secondary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of school to Teachers, which included 5 Heads, 11 Assistant Heads, HOD 1, 211 teachers, and 50 educators, ranging from instructors to support teachers.

#### College Seven (Scholastic year 2009-2010)

- 5 coeducational kindergarten centres housed in primary school grounds;
- 7 coeducational state primary schools (In two towns there was a Primary School A – Years 1, 2 & 3, and a Primary School B – Years 4, 5 & 6);
- 1 Girls’ ‘grammar’ school-type Junior Lyceum and 1 Boys’ ‘grammar’ school-type Junior Lyceum;
- 1; Boys’ Secondary school;
- 286 Primary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of school to Teachers. Amongst them there were 6 Heads, 1 Acting Head, 16 Assistant Heads, 76 teachers and 187 educators, ranging from instructors to support teachers;
- 257 Secondary school practitioners, ranging from Heads of school to Teachers, which included 3 Heads, 12 Assistant Heads, 15 HODs, 195 teachers, and 32 educators, ranging from instructors to support teachers.

### ***5.3.2. The Primary Theme of Collaboration and Networking***

The narratives of the interviewees, observation field notes and review of official documents provided me with significant sub-themes. Many of the emergent sub-themes were identical to those that appeared in Phase One. However, the following few sub-themes (collaboration – not an easy venture, inappropriate criticism and learning opportunities) arose in Phase Two of the study.

#### ***1. Collaboration – not an easy venture***

The data made evident that the interviewed policy-makers claimed that implementing and sustaining the reform would not be an easy undertaking. However, they also admitted that the last three years had been a learning curve for them and that they were making adjustments as they moved on. Consequently there was a consensual acknowledgement that changing the mind-set of hundreds of educators was proving to be challenging. They perceived that there could be people who would argue in favour of that model and others who would militate against it. Nonetheless they noted that the developments that had taken place since 2005 were promising. With hindsight, they admitted that they needed to allow the process of transformation to take its course and maybe slow it down so as to avoid ‘burnt out’ within the teaching force. They understood that achieving success in this endeavour required effort, hard work and perseverance. One policy-maker argued:

Unfortunately there are too many issues which alienate many from focusing on what is really important in education. One such issue is evidence of power struggle as individual Heads feel threatened by what they perceive as impositions by the College Principal. Not only that, but educators need to move away from ‘our school’ mentality. Sometimes it is more comfortable remaining attached to our status quo. The feedback that we are getting is that educators, particularly Heads of School, feel overwhelmed with work and this is discouraging them. So I feel that in this area we need to rethink and do not continue to overload the schools with endless number of projects and tasks. (PM4, Ph2)

Another policy-maker, whilst agreeing with the above, went on to add that:

At times I think that we are trying to do too much at once and this can backfire if we are not careful. (PM6, Ph2)

Although policy-makers acknowledged that what was happening might appear overwhelming, yet they maintained that the CCoH brought the HoS together and the Heads were no longer individuals running only their school. They insisted that the college model brought people together. One policy-maker argued:

If we are to sustain the college model, everyone needs to understand that working with other people implies sacrificing what one believed is important for a school to that of creating the whole idea of a college. We have to sacrifice ones so called identity for the common identity, which is that of a college. (PM6, Ph2)

## *2. Inappropriate criticism*

The data highlighted the dissatisfaction of teacher interviewees who found the criticism of the Directorates about the supposed apathy of the teachers towards the reforms rather unacceptable. The teachers criticised the Central Authorities for not including them in the consultation stage of the reforms. They claimed that such an attitude had impacted them negatively because they felt cheated, particularly when they were the ones who would be implementing the changes in the classroom. One Secondary school teacher claimed:

I can say with confidence that teachers were neither consulted nor prepared for the changes. Moreover, when we ask questions about the reforms and changes taking place we are still left in the dark because whoever is implementing the changes does not have answers. There appears to be lack planning for the great number of reforms that have to be in place. (T7, Sec., College Six, Ph.2)

## *3. Learning opportunities*

The study made apparent another sub-theme around the primary theme of collaboration and networking. It became clear from the data that teachers and Heads did have in place a rather rudimentary form of intra and inter-school working. Consequently, both Heads and teachers did speak about their work and the students with their peers and colleagues but this collaboration did not translate into collegiality and sharing of sources and practice. The findings indicated sections in the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) that made provisions for learning opportunity spaces; weekly ninety minutes curricular development meetings. The data from interviews with Heads and teachers pointed to inferences of reservations about the realisation of these meetings. It emerged that although teachers had the weekly ninety minutes curricular development opportunity, the sessions were sporadic, especially for Primary school teachers, because the personnel to substitute the teachers were not always available. A substantial number of Heads of Primary schools noted that releasing their teachers for these meetings was not always possible because they relied on the availability of peripatetic teachers who substituted the class teachers. They thought that the Directorates needed to find avenues on how national policies could be translated into practice.

### ***5.3.3 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Leadership and Management***

#### *1. Effective leadership skills*

The findings around the secondary theme of leadership and management offered some other noteworthy sub-themes. It emerged that school and teacher leadership is essentially concerned with high quality learning and teaching and thus the majority claimed that it should be given its rightful importance. They thought that leaders needed to have appropriate skills that could help sustain quality teaching and learning. Consequently, Galea, (2005, p.xi) argued that the proposed reforms would be ensuring ‘**quality education for all**’ (emphasis in *FACTS*, 2005). They were confident that when leaders had the right skills, the outcomes on student achievement could be positive.

#### *2. Negotiating the centralisation–decentralisation tension*

The emerging data made the sub-theme of negotiating the centralisation-decentralisation tension a significant issue in Phase Two of the study. Responses showed that authority and control is still a controversial issue. Interviewees, particularly Heads and teachers, felt that the Directorates needed to negotiate more in this field but how they could negotiate and what could be negotiated was still to be seen. They admitted to being naïve as to how this should be done but they were convinced that

Maltese education could not have or retain a centralized system. One Head of Secondary school argued:

We do need strong Directorates that establish vision; present clear strategic goals and support schools as we address our own goals. It is granted that the Directorates need to monitor practices in order to see that national goals are being adequately addressed, yet we need to be given more leeway in how we manage our colleges, schools and classrooms. I think that decentralization encourages participants directly in leadership. All Educational leaders (regardless of their status) need to design mechanisms, roles and structures that achieve a greater degree of decentralization. (T8, Sec., College Five, Ph.2)

Conversely, policy-makers and Central Authorities argued that it could be unrealistic to think that we should move to a totally decentralised model because the context did not lend itself. They thought that it was not a question of moving from a centralised to a decentralised system but that in the Maltese context it was more of creating a balance between the two. To support their argument, many cited the educational budget that was drawn up by the Central Government. One policy-maker stated:

I do believe that **yes** (interviewee's emphasis) we have a centralized system but as I have always argued, it has been a weak one at that since the Centre did not know what was happening in the periphery, in our schools, what teaching and learning is taking place in the respective classrooms etc. We need strong Directorates that set standards. There is no argument that we have a weak implementation and evaluation process. The Directorates are being strengthened and at the same time, the schools, through the College reform, are being strengthened in creating a sense of identity. We need to debate what has to remain national and what can be college decision-making. (PM5, Ph2)

Another interviewed policy-maker highlighted the above with the claims that the goals of the Colleges needed to be standardized and consequently the Directorates were being strengthened because policies were implemented after due consultations with all stakeholders. The whole idea was to have a stronger system through the practice of consultation. Other interviewed policy-makers asserted that we have to be cautious because there could be the possibility of people going in too many diverse ways as soon as one started giving the opportunity for empowerment at the college level. One policy-maker summed up what all interviewed policy-makers have claimed when stating that:

One of our challenges is to create a stronger evaluation process where at the national level we appreciate what is happening and if need be bring back those who have diversified from the national goals. (PM2, Ph2)

### *3. Distributed leadership*

Noteworthy in the findings were the various forms of leadership styles that the interviewees spoke about, but in particular, the sub-theme of distributed leadership. Overall, particularly teachers, when addressing the concept of distributed leadership pointed to a degree of tension that could have implications on the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working by individual schools. Teachers claimed that Heads tended to delegate work and responsibilities rather

than consult them in the decision-making processes. As a result they felt that rather than being engaged in collaborative ventures they were still working mostly in isolation from each other. The interviewed teachers added that if this was realised they would be sharing common values and working collaboratively to construct shared meaning. One policy-maker seemed to underline a common conviction among interviewees:

If distributed leadership was complemented with discussion, leaders of Maltese colleges and schools would be creating effectively distributive institutions. This would imply that the capability of that organization would be the function of the collective knowledge, skills and character of its members. Teachers would grow as leaders as they gradually learn new skills together. School leaders need to discuss more rather than assign. (PM5, Ph2)

One Head of Primary school seemed to sum up what others had said and also corroborated the above policy-makers' claims when she noted:

Distributed and shared leadership does away with hierarchies entirely and fosters the democratic principle of participation, dialogue and the nature of collaboration in a policy context as sanctioned by the Act of 2006. (HoS12, Pri., College Five, Ph2)

#### *4. Leadership and professional development programmes*

Again, it is worth noting that leadership and professional development programmes emerged as a significant sub-theme in the findings. There was consensus among College and school leaders that providing space for their teachers to grow and develop was central for the sustainability of joint-working. They appreciated that such a venture would not be as clear cut as one might think. The interviewees concurred that they needed to tread carefully. They argued that while on one hand they have to act as catalysts of the growth and development of their members of staff, they also had to create the right working relationship with their subordinates so that their involvement would not inhibit spontaneous initiatives taken by their personnel.

It became apparent in the findings that the sub-theme of professional development programmes continued to gain importance because it emerged as a central issue for Heads of large schools. These Heads added that HoS with a small population should hold professional development sessions for their teachers on a regular basis, ideally in conjunction with other schools. Many thought that college-based initiatives could render a more enhanced experience because it could be a shared experience where individuals met their counterparts and colleagues within their catchment area. One College Principal claimed:

We need to ensure that inter-school joint-working by teachers, particularly when they meet to collaborate and share practice during the one and a half weekly sessions, is reaping results. Furthermore it will help them keep track of what is happening outside their classroom walls and schools. (P2, College Six, Ph2)

### *5. Leadership qualities within a context*

The data for this study also underlined the issue of leadership qualities, around which there were some very interesting and significant answers. Many of the interviewees, particularly policy-makers and college principals, seemed to find concurrence on the point that certain qualities were needed at all levels. They claimed that some leaders could have some qualities; others could have a few, while others have more but probably no one has the complete set of qualities needed for the/a job. One Policy-maker argued:

Qualities could not be lived in a vacuum. There was the need to be a manifestation of leadership qualities on a day to day basis so that people could actually look back and say: this was how we nurtured trust within our college or school; this was the way we expressed solidarity and support, whether on a professional level and more so on a personal level. (PM1, Ph2)

Additionally, they argued that leaders needed to create an environment, a milieu where those qualities could be nurtured, not just within the person but within others. Finally, they claimed that leadership qualities needed to be placed in a context and nurtured within that context.

### *6. Leadership and the human dimension*

One final sub-theme highlighted in Phase Two was the issue of leadership and the human dimension. The respondents, particularly teachers, claimed that leaders were still quite autocratic in the way they managed change and the way they communicated with members of staff. One Primary school teacher in fact stated:

Many of our Heads, and even education officials are insensitive when delegating or communicating directives. Very often the attitude is outweighed by a tone of authority, lacks understanding and empathy. They seem to be oblivious of our tension and uncertainty as we live the ongoing changes. (T23, Pri., College Seven, Ph2)

Teacher interviewees thought that their leaders' only concern was the task. They claimed that leaders forgot that to get to the task they needed to work with and alongside people. Such perception seemed to find corroboration in the narrative of one policy-maker who stated:

A leader could be called a leader when s/he was sensitive to the physical environment, particularly the people that create these environments. However, I do believe that respect for the other needs to be mutual. (PM3, Ph2)

### ***5.3.4 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Governance and Governing***

The interviewees' narratives, observation of CCoH meetings and reviewing official documents again offered some new noteworthy sub-themes around the subsidiary theme of governance and governing. It emerged that the secondary theme of governance and governing was an area of controversy, particularly as to how far should the Directorates relinquish their powers. The viewpoint of policy-makers and that of interviewees at the College/School levels presented some interesting insights central to the diversified stances.

### *1. The issue of power*

The findings showed that policy-makers concurred that if the Directorates relinquished power and ultimate responsibility, it could 'be a dangerous path to take'. They thought that an education system without any form of governing body was inconceivable. Policy-makers thought that the Maltese Education system needed stronger Directorates to develop policies, monitor their implementation whilst devolving greater responsibilities to the schools. One policy maker's statement is singled out because of its comprehensiveness:

Our Education system is a highly centralized one. However, we are now seeking a new way of working where Heads are no longer working alone but members of a College Council of Heads. We also introduced the post of the College Principal. This means that Heads now work together for the wellbeing of the whole College. (PM5, Ph2)

The issue of the change in dynamics between the Directorates and Colleges emerged as central around the sub-theme of power that was addressed by policy-makers. They concurred that in the past Heads clamoured for more authority to lead their school and now they are being told that they will be working and taking decisions within a new context – that of College networks. However, on reflection they added that some might argue that it was a prescribed context. The data also made evident that the Heads were conscious that the new model could create new opportunities and that the onus lay on the individual Head. However, Heads needed to realise that the current context required that they learnt how to work with others and the CCoH was going to serve as the platform for decision-making. HoS had to motivate their staff to come, share and learn. With hindsight the policy-makers cautiously admitted that getting there would take time, maybe years.

There was also concurrence among the policy-makers that HoS needed to strike a balance between working and governing with other team members (i.e. CCoH), and shouldering responsibilities for their school. Policy-makers believed that some would never get there because they could not work in a team. However, one Policy-maker claimed:

I believe that the level of empowerment devolving to the Colleges and schools could eventually lead to improved practice where it matters; that is, the child. (PM4, Ph2)

### *2. Ineffective school governance and governing*

The findings delineated that interviewees, particularly teachers, felt that the poor communication channels with the Head had left them unable to speak openly during school meetings. Many felt that their respective HoS did not discuss with them relevant information pertaining to their school but simply delegated. Teachers felt that they seemed to be simply obeying the directives of their Head. One Secondary school teacher stated:

The current situation makes us feel that we are **only** (interviewee's emphasis) there to teach the students. We are there to obey and follow the directives of our Heads, and implement policies devised by the Central Authorities. Considering all this, I truly question the effectiveness of our current form of school governance and governing, and whether it is actually sustaining the desired changes of the reform. (T3, Sec., College One, Ph.2)



The study also revealed that the Heads thought that the workings of governance and governing had become complex due to the ongoing reforms. They claimed that their roles had been inadequately described in official documents and that the current configuration of the nature of their delegated responsibilities was unclear. The data continued to show that the College reform brought on a broader range of new responsibilities and tasks, which was hindering Heads from conducting proper school governing. It emerged that the communication between the Directorates and the schools was considered weak because very rarely did the Central Authorities address Heads' concerns and problems. Heads felt that school governing could become ineffective. As one Head of Primary school claimed:

I think that the Directorates rarely address the concerns and problems that the current reform created and so we feel at a loss as to how we should deal with situations. I, like many of my peers, feel that this is impinging and making school governance and governing ineffective. (HoS13, Pri., College Seven, Ph2)

### *3. Personnel recruitment*

The findings of Phase Two established a new sub-theme: the recruitment of personnel, which both Heads and teachers considered central to governance and governing. They believed that schools should have more freedom in governance and governing; such as the recruitment of personnel. The study showed that if Colleges were given recruitment responsibilities, the leaders would be able to address the needs of their institution better. They held that such freedom around governance and governing of the colleges would add value to the institution and the overall performance of schools.

The analysed data pointed to contrasting views between policy-makers and the above mentioned interviewees. Policy-makers argued that currently it was more feasible to keep the recruitment process the responsibility of the DES. However, the same interviewees acknowledged that in certain practices there had been a change of policy. Policy-makers claimed that although College Principals did not have the power to employ Heads of School, they did consult the Principals and their views were given the deserved attention before a decision was taken. One Policy maker stated:

We have forums where we consult the College Principals to see what characteristics they are looking for in a Head of School. We discuss with the Principals the skills that they believe a school leader should have. We also visit the issues of attitudes, values and qualities. (PM1, Ph2)

### *4. College Board*

The College Board emerged as a significant sub-theme around governance and governing because it was a bone of contention among policy-makers and interviewed personnel at College/school level. Whilst policy-makers had felt that the Board was not top priority, those in the schools felt that not having the Board in place was nothing short of a missed opportunity. They claimed that since the College Board was to be composed of individuals from the community outside the College, the colleges were losing out on what could be an asset to helping the schools reflect on issues that those on the inside would have taken for granted. One particular Principal stated that:

The Board members could very well serve as critical friends who can constructively point out what can be done better and what can be improved.

We can also bounce off them new ideas for the holistic well-being of the College. So it would be a two way kind of communication. After all the role of the College Board was that it would advise on direction. It is this Board that would help us Principals to reflect. (P3, College Seven, Ph2)

Ironically, the importance of the College Board was underlined by one policy-maker who stated that:

A College Board will have the space, the flexibility and power to challenge what is going on in the schools but within that framework of accountability as established by the NMC. However, the College Board will not have the power to change the direction of a particular college/school as it saw fit. The structure and framework will be there and the College Board has to operate within that framework. (PM3, Ph2)

### ***5.3.5 The Subsidiary Theme of Accountability Relationships***

The findings of the second phase on the subsidiary theme of accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved also underlined a set of new sub-themes, namely:

- the missing accountability dimension;
- commitment and accountability;
- accountability to external agencies (addressed school internal auditing and external reviews, in particular the school external review process).

#### ***1. The missing accountability dimension***

The data (its three forms) made evident that accountability was a missing dimension among educators. It emerged that the nature of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working by individual schools and which was introduced by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) had implication for accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved. Consequently the current form of accountability needed revisiting. There was concurrence among interviewees that accountability appeared to be lacking amongst educators. The Minister of Education, Youth and Employment in the interview stated:

When I was given the Education portfolio I found that the education system was full of obstacles and that everyone considered himself unaccountable. I wanted to develop a model by which the Central Education Authorities monitor the performance of all school stakeholders, from the Head to the non-academic staff. I wanted to ensure that everyone felt accountable and responsible. My objective was not control but creating a system that made college and school practitioners morally accountable for their performance. I consider it my moral responsibility in safeguarding the chances of those students of low socio-economic status. This is the only way I could give these students a fighting chance. (Minister1, Ph2)

One policy maker corroborated the above statement by the claim:

Unfortunately, I do find that we as a nation lack an accountability culture. Being a dominated nation for so many years seems to have left us with a mind-set that we expect our superiors to be accountable but not us. And if we cannot do that, we try to pass on the buck onto others in the lower ranks. I believe that fostering and sustaining such a culture across colleges and schools was going to be a big challenge. (PM6, Ph2)

One College Principal added that if educators wanted to keep up with their global educational counterparts they had to reflect and hold themselves accountable for whatever was done in their respective college. The participant stated:

It is crucial to have a source of accountability for the child's educational journey that society has entrusted us with. We need to work at being responsible and accountable, and it is not us or them, but all of us – directorates, colleges and schools. It is us being accountable for one main programme; helping every child to succeed. (P4, College Five, Ph2)

Generally, the interviewees felt that today, more than ever, because of the competitive economic environment educators needed to give accountability its due importance since society expected to see higher standards in education. They thought that accountability, apart from strengthening and motivating the stakeholders, would also help them to monitor and improve the local education system.

## *2. Commitment and accountability*

Another significant sub-theme that emerged was around the notion that commitment and accountability complimented each other. Respondents drew parallelisms between commitment to the reform and one's responsibilities to his/her area of work; regardless of whether they were college or school leaders or teachers. Overall, there seemed to be agreement on the point that their responsibilities, moral disposition and their role as educators to facilitate holistic education challenged them to commit themselves to the reform; particularly to the new collaborative endeavour, regarded by many as one of the fundamental pillars for the success of the 2006 ongoing reforms.

Many also held that one cannot feel committed to the cause unless s/he held herself or himself accountable. They added that those who did not feel committed to the reform meant that they were not committed to their work since the principal objective of the reform was the transformation of the Maltese Education system and 'quality education for all' (MEYE, 2005). One Head of a Primary school stated that:

It is a reality that changes and reforms are not welcomed and approved by all. However, reforms are implemented to establish change that is intended to bring about the perceived and desired improvement. I feel that if we are truly professional educators we need to be committed and more accountable for our work. The current reform has brought on new accountability demands, particularly from parents and students. (HoS14, Pri., College Six, Ph2)

The findings continued to reveal that all interviewees understood that educators were responsible to society who had trusted them with the responsibility of educating its youth and young

generation. They also felt accountable to their superiors, their peers, students and parents. Surprisingly enough the respondents were in agreement that unfortunately there were a number of educators who did not appear that enthusiastic about their work and therefore lacked a moral sense of purpose to coin Fullan's (1995) term. They thought that such individuals needed to seriously reflect on their role since accountability demanded both honesty and maturity. College Principals and some Heads concurred that their attitude and commitment towards the college or school was instrumental in transforming and motivating behaviour. Whilst a HoS school stated: 'unfortunately we do not always prepare the ground before we step on it' (HoS3, Sec., College Six, Ph2), one Principal claimed that:

The leader's enthusiasm is contagious and draws his/her subordinates to participate in collaborative activities. I believe that College and school leaders are accountable for their actions and as leaders they need to create opportunities so that other college or school members express their full potential. (P2, College Six, Ph2)

### *3. Accountability to external agencies*

The interviewed Heads demonstrated concurrence around the sub-theme of accountability to external agencies. They believed educators were accountable for any form or type of activity in the school, particularly because of the implications that certain Articles of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) created for accountability.

Additionally, HoS claimed that the ongoing introduction of reforms and increase in workload added pressure, consequently hampering their leadership responsibilities in trying to adopt the shared leadership dimension to their work. Interviewed Principals and HoS admitted that leaders of schools in Malta tended to be cautious, if not over cautious, when it came to fostering a culture of shared leadership because, as one HoS argued:

Both the assistant heads and teachers know that at the end the buck stops with me. Consequently, before any one of them take decisions on matters or projects that I make them responsible for, they always approach me to consult me and ensure that I was ultimately responsible. (HoS4, Sec., College Five, Ph2)

The stance of the Heads around the sub-theme of distributed and shared leadership demonstrated that nurturing shared leadership among the members of the SMT and teachers seemed rather challenging, because of the accountability parameters set for them by their superiors at the Directorates or by the Principal. They felt that when they assigned responsibilities to their members of staff, they had to set them working boundaries. The individuals would then tailor their contributions to what they thought was acceptable to the HoS. One Head of a Secondary School admitted: 'My assistant heads consult me continuously. They are not ready to take decisions without consulting me.' (HoS5, Sec., College Seven, Ph2) The narrative of another Head of a J.L. school, whilst agreeing offered justification as to why she encourages this aspect:

I am consulted before a decision is taken. I might make a suggestion. I do not discourage this because ultimately I am held responsible and accountable if anything goes wrong. Heads of School are very conscious of this and that eventually we have to face the music with our superiors and at times even with our politicians. (HoS6, J.L., College Six, Ph2)

*a. Internal auditing*

The data indicated that statements central to the sub-theme of internal auditing revolved around the need for a change in mentality. The statements seemed to highlight the need that all professional educators needed to undergo a paradigm shift in order to mature in the way they perceived accountability. Educators needed to understand that being held responsible was actually part of their professional growth process.

Additionally, the findings highlighted the concurrence on the Performance Management Programme (PMP); a performance appraisal system used with every government civil servant. The interviewees admitted that the PMP had to be revisited. They felt that not only should it be linked to one's professional development but that it should be ongoing. It should not be sporadic, as was currently the practice. One policy-maker added:

The PMP should be considered synonymous with our work because we need to keep on growing by learning from each other. If we express the need to improve and what we did then we are consolidating accountability. Feeling the need to improve meant that we were reflecting and we reflect because we felt responsible; then we feel accountable. (PM4, Ph2)

*b. External review*

The external review process (an accountability exercise that helped schools to conform to national standards) fell within the remit of the DQSE. The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) established that such reviews should be 'in support of the evaluation and the internal audit of every school' (Laws of Malta, 2006, Part II, Article 9 (2e):630). Policy-makers claimed that the external auditing of schools conducted after 2006 was meant to help schools identify their weaknesses and empower them to enhance their performance in line with the parameters and vision set by the National Curriculum Framework.

*i. The school external review process*

The findings made apparent that all interviewees had been familiar with the external auditing system that the Education Division conducted prior to 2005, but were not acquainted with the content of the guidelines and criteria of the external review process that were being prepared. A review of official documents and the actual praxis suggested that the new external review system for local schools was published in 2010 but certain areas had not yet been amended.

The interviewees believed that such an auditing exercise (which involved observing lessons, interviewing members of the school, members of the Students' Council; analysing the ethos and vision of the school; reviewing teachers' lesson plans and schemes of work etc.) was required because it discouraged any attempt by school practitioners to fabricate outcomes. They also held that performance monitoring was important because any education system needed feedback about how its practitioners performed if they wanted to learn and improve their professional standards.

Generally, the external auditing exercise was considered to create homogeneity, ensured that all colleges followed the same standards and criteria and promoted the same culture of consistent excellence. The interviewees showed a common conviction that accountability systems established clear performance standards. However, they held that the objective of such accountability audit systems should be there to identify weaknesses and offer support. Those schools or individuals who

showed weaknesses should not simply be reprimanded and left at that. The DQSE should create a structure to implement a strategy or strategies of support. One Junior Lyceum Head of School stated:

If the DQSE lacked the personnel that could offer the required assistance and the appropriate training, professional external agents or agencies should be engaged to perform the tasks. If the outcome of external school reviews is to support the schools in becoming effective professional learning communities and not to reprimand us and transparency is respected then we will start believing in the importance of external auditing. (HoS7, JL., College Seven, Ph2)

### ***5.3.6 An Overview of Phase Two***

The context of this brief overview are the findings of Phase Two based on the review of official documents, observing CCoH meetings and interviewees' narratives as they lived through the experience of the ongoing reforms that were meant to address the laudable goal of providing 'quality education for all' *FACTS* (2005). The interviewees (as in Phase One) were of different ages, at different stages in their careers, had passed through distinct experiences and were working in different contexts.

The findings showed that the ongoing reform and changes central to the theme of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working by individual schools created implications for educational leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved, since they were leaving an impact on the various stakeholders. Additionally, the findings made evident the diverse notions, stances and opinions of the interviewees. The data also underlined the benefits, challenges, issues and concerns of the interviewees and their peers. The study made evident a significant and varied perspective of the four key themes and the sub-themes that emerged as evidenced in the daily realities of the interviewees.

#### ***1. Emergent themes***

While recognizing the limitations of this overview of the study of Phase Two, since it presented the narratives of a selected cohort from four colleges, it still had the possibility of identifying a number of themes and sub-themes. In sum, the key findings identified in Phase Two of the study are grouped under the headings of the four key themes of the research as listed below.

##### ***a. Networking and collaboration***

The findings pointed out a number of sub-themes significant to the understanding of the primary theme of collaboration in a policy context that required joint-working by individual schools. It became evident that for many of the interviewees, intra- and inter- school collaboration would not be an easy venture and consequently made inferences to possible tensions and challenges. Interviewees (particularly teachers) expressed dissatisfaction for inappropriate criticism that was levelled at them by education officials. Further dissatisfaction was central to the weekly 90 minutes curricular development meetings. Primary school teachers complained that, in their case, the sessions were sporadic because the personnel that substituted them were not always available.

##### ***b. Educational leadership and management***

A number of sub-themes showed the implications that the form of collaboration, as sanctioned by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006), was having on educational leadership and management. The collected

data highlighted the perceptions of the respondents around the dimension of effective leadership skills that could help sustain quality teaching and learning. Negotiating the centralisation-decentralisation tension emerged as a sub-theme of controversy. Heads and teachers felt that the Directorates needed to negotiate more in this area and create a more democratic system at College/school level. Contrariwise, policy-makers and Central Authorities argued that it was not a question of moving from a centralised to a decentralised system, but that in the Maltese context there was the need of finding the right balance between centralised and decentralised governance structures. The findings also made evident the presence of tension around distributed leadership and that there was the need for leadership and professional development programmes. Interviewed leaders acknowledged the need of providing space for teachers to grow and develop. The sub-themes of leadership qualities within a context and the importance of leaders demonstrating the human dimension became very significant, particularly among interviewed teachers.

*c. Educational governance and governing*

The study also made evident a diverse selection of new sub-themes, which highlighted the implications that the form of collaboration, as sanctioned by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) was having on the subsidiary theme of governance and governing. There also emerged from the data a core set of views by the respondents. It pointed to the missing concurrence around the issue of power. Though policy-makers claimed that the education system had to have some form of governing body they acknowledged that the system needed stronger Directorates to develop policies, monitor their implementation whilst devolving greater responsibilities to the schools. The findings also suggested the inference of concerns around the sub-themes of personnel recruitment. The final sub-theme that emerged around governance and governing addressed the introduction of the College Board. This Board offered grounds for diverse opinion; mainly having policy-makers contending that the board did not necessitate immediate attention and those at school level claiming the colleges were losing out on what could have been an asset for schools.

*d. Accountability relationships*

Considering the implications that the nature of collaboration, as sanctioned by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) was having on the subsidiary theme of accountability relationships within and between institutions involved, the data pointed to the missing accountability dimension amongst many of the educators and even at the Directorates. Consequently, the study showed that various interviewees allied commitment and accountability. They made the point that their responsibilities, moral disposition and their role as educators to facilitate holistic education challenged them to commit themselves to the reform; particularly to the new collaborative endeavour. The final sub-theme that emerged was around accountability to external agencies, particularly those on school internal auditing, external reviews and the school external review process.

## **5.4 A Cross Case Analysis of the Findings**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

In this section of the chapter I present a cross case analysis of the findings that emerged in the two phases. The objective of this part of the chapter is to provide the reader with a synopsis of the cohesion and diversity between the data of the four cases collected in both phases of my research.

Participants (interviewees and observed members of CCoH), in both Phases of the study, were exceptionally supportive and receptive. The collected data suggested that there were both consistencies and different stances on the various themes and sub-themes that emerged. The overall picture indicated that the reforms had generated fundamental changes in many sectors and how HoS

and teachers worked. Generally, the ongoing changes identified by the participants in the study were predominantly central to the four themes of the research questions:

- the way educators and schools synergized, related and collaborated with each other;
- establishing a new philosophy of shared leadership that would help Maltese education to go forward and remain relevant to the global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century;
- revisiting the way decision making was to being undertaken;
- creating a strong orientation towards collective values, particularly a collective sense of responsibility and accountability.

However friendly was the rhetoric of the policy-makers and the Central Authorities, the bottom line was that the changes, shaped by a number of policies sanctioned by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) generated a series of challenges. These challenges, which were highlighted by the data collected from interviews and observation field notes, were the offshoot of the paradigm shift in culture and mind-set that educators were consequently compelled to undergo. Additionally, the analysed data, in certain instances, also presented a different perspective to what was presented by policy documents and communicated by the Directorates at the time.

#### ***5.4.2 The Official Documents***

Proposals for a number of ground-breaking and robust reforms in the Maltese Education system, had been presented in *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005) and sanctioned by *The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006* (Laws of Malta, 2006); particularly:

- overhauling the overly ‘top down’ bureaucratic system of Maltese Education that had been organized round an established hierarchical, apex governed structure;
- reinforcing the decentralisation model initiated in 1999;
- grouping all Maltese State Schools into ten regional colleges;
- fostering an intra- and inter-school joint-working culture among educators in Maltese State Schools.

#### ***5.4.3 Policy-Makers’ Philosophy***

The interviewed policy-makers, during both phases of the study, had made their vision for Maltese Education and the Colleges unequivocally clear. Those interviewed in Phase 2 had been consistent with those interviewed in Phase 1. They had placed direct emphasis on the understanding that:

- the college networks were the new essential units of organisation that could transform Maltese education to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century;
- intra-school joint-working and inter-school networks demand a culture change and that school practitioners had to foster, cultivate and sustain school collaboration and collegiality;



- college networks have to be sustained by collaborative endeavour;
- leaders of colleges and State schools had to be visionary leaders and have skills and competencies to adopt a number of styles that would sustain their role as agents of change and the new form of collaborative endeavour;
- educational entities survive better through securing partnerships based on shared responsibilities;
- Maltese schools' practitioners need to reinforce the existing fragile links and partnerships with parents and the wider community.

#### ***5.4.4 The Primary Theme of Collaboration***

##### *1. Commonality between Phase One and Phase Two of the study*

When comparing the findings of the two phases of the study there emerged an element of commonality around the primary theme of collaboration, primarily:

- inferences to the history of informal collaboration;
- having intra- and inter- school collaboration;
- controversy surrounding the current collaborative and collegial model;
- the benefits of working collaboratively, particularly that it fostered dialogue; that intra- and inter-school joint-working were more rewarding and enhancing the art of teaching and that working collaboratively established bringing together various expertise, various ideas and practices, which translated themselves into combined energy;
- the challenges around this primary theme, mainly that of: commitment to the reform; transforming the isolationist model into a collaborative endeavour; and issues of school identity, uniqueness and the diversity dimension.

##### *2. Sub-themes evident only in Phase Two*

The new sub-themes that emerged exclusively in Phase Two are as follows:

- that collaboration was not an easy venture to achieve considering the diversified human mind-set and that all stakeholders will have to make an effort so that the primary objective of ensuring that all children succeed would be achieved;
- that interviewees, particularly teachers felt affronted by inappropriate remarks levelled at them by certain education officials;
- interviewees, particularly Heads and teachers expressed concern around the sub-theme of learning opportunities because although the Act made provisions for learning opportunity spaces (weekly ninety minutes curricular development meetings), the meetings were sporadic since they materialised only when peripatetic teachers visited the schools to substitute the class teacher.

#### ***5.4.5 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Leadership and Management***

##### *1. Consistency between Phase One and Phase Two of the study*

All the collected data from both phases of the study demonstrated a comprehensive picture of the way in which the participants had perceived the implications for leadership and management of the institutions involved within the framework of a collaborative endeavour in a policy context that

required joint working by individual schools. The research pointed to a good level of consistency in sub-themes around the secondary theme of educational leadership and management. The sub-themes that found common ground by the interviewees of the different phases of the research were as follows:

- roles and responsibilities around educational leadership and management, in which the interviewees visited the dimension of the leadership and management roles;
- the leadership skills that a leader had to have, primarily: being change agents, which meant that leaders had to understand the complexity of change and that they had to build trust with their staff; leaders needed to demonstrate courage and confidence that would help them face the current challenges; they also had to show visionary leadership that would help them forge and sustain intra-school relationships;
- the concept of leadership styles was also the attention of the interviewees focusing mainly on collegial leadership and shared leadership;
- a series of concerns and challenges precipitated by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) emerged, mainly: motivating others; having an overloaded management role; teachers' anxiety (this was acknowledged by the Heads when they spoke about their teachers who were experiencing fear, anxiety and panic because of all the changes and adaptations they were expected to take on board); college micro-politics addressed by the Heads who claimed that decentralisation of leadership roles was at best artificial and that in many instances the role that Central Authorities used to undertake was now in the hands of the Principal. Finally having a highly-unionized State was making the situation more complex because the MUT seemed to stifle initiative if it infringed on the conditions of the collective agreement.

## *2. Sub-themes emerging solely in Phase Two*

The findings around the secondary theme of leadership and management offered some other noteworthy sub-themes that emerged exclusively in Phase Two of the study and which are presented below:

- certain interviewees (policy-makers and principals) thought that leaders needed to have the proper skills that could help sustain the ongoing reforms and believed that when leaders had the right skills, the outcomes on improved relationships with teachers and ultimately on student achievement could be positive;
- the sub-theme of negotiating the centralisation-decentralisation tension became evident that it was a controversial issue for Heads and teachers (who felt that the Central Authorities needed to negotiate more in this area and give more autonomy to the schools), and policy-makers and Central Authorities (who contrariwise believed that transforming the education system from a centralised into a decentralised one would be disadvantageous for Maltese Education, and consequently they were supportive of a balance model between centralisation and decentralisation);
- the forms of distributed leadership pointed to a degree of tension among teachers who maintained that Heads tended to delegate work and responsibilities rather than engaged them in collaborative ventures;
- the need for leaders to engage in providing professional development programmes emerged as a significant sub-theme;
- college-based initiatives were identified as a desired development as interviewees believed that it would lead to shared experiences where individuals meet their counterparts and colleagues within their catchment area; to collaborate and keep track of what is happening outside their classroom walls and schools;

- a final sub-theme addressed the sub-theme of leadership and the human dimension, which again was an issue for teachers who argued against the current autocratic attitude of Heads and education officials, particularly how they managed change and the way they communicated with their members of staff.

#### ***5.4.6 The Subsidiary Theme of Educational Governance and Governing***

##### ***1. Shared sub-themes between Phase One and Phase Two of the Study***

The study made evident that interviewees in Phase One shared similar opinions and insights with their interviewed counterparts in Phase Two in the sub-themes that emerged around the subsidiary theme of governance and governing. The presentation of the shared sub-themes was as follows:

- the interviewees understanding of educational governance and governing;
- knowledge about the restructuring of the Maltese Education Governing System, particularly the two directorates and the 10 new colleges;
- understanding new decision-making structures
- the current governance and governing model within the colleges;
- work overload was addressed by interviewees, particularly by Heads who complained that the increased work load had left them no time to attend to the academic needs of the students, since they were not finding time to monitor lessons or mentor new teachers;
- concerns that were also evident around this secondary theme addressed mainly: the ‘top-down’ approach and the current lack of consultation with both Heads of School and teachers respectively.

##### ***2 Sub-themes made evident only in Phase Two***

The findings around the subsidiary theme of educational governance and governing offered some other notable sub-themes that became evident entirely in Phase Two of the study. The sub-themes are presented below:

- the issue of power, particularly the issue of the change in dynamics between the Centre and Colleges emerged as central around the sub-theme of power for policy-makers, who were not willing to consider the possibility of an education system without any form of governing body;
- linked to the above was the sub-theme of ineffective governance and governing;
- personnel recruitment was also identified as a critical issue by the interviewees;
- the College Board, which until the time of presentation of this study was not yet in place, was a source of concern for many of the interviewees

#### ***5.4.7 The Subsidiary Theme of Accountability Relationships***

##### ***1. Common sub-themes in Phase One and Phase Two of the study***

The analysis of the findings of both phases made apparent that the substance of the narratives of the participants demonstrated parallel views and observations with the respondents of Phase One in the sub-themes that emerged around the subsidiary theme of accountability relationships. The presentation of the shared sub-themes was as follows:

- the respondents understanding of the secondary theme of accountability relationships;

- the data showed that school networks endorsed collective accountability which in turn emerged as a central concept to the sub-theme of accountability relationships.
- the *Education (Amendment) Act 2006* (Laws of Malta, 2006) raised implications on the way educators had to engage with each other, which in turn introduced a new way of working;
- the interviewees also visited the secondary sub-themes of a new accountability framework and that of the decision-making authority.

## *2 Sub-themes in Phase Two*

The findings around the secondary theme of accountability relationships offered also some other notable sub-themes that emerged only in Phase Two of the study. The emergent sub-themes are as follows:

- the sub-theme of the missing accountability dimension became evident in the second phase of the study and interviewees acknowledged that accountability appeared to be lacking amongst educators and that Maltese educators needed to demonstrate more responsibility for their work;
- interviewees allied commitment with accountability;
- finally, accountability to external agencies, which addressed the secondary sub-themes of internal auditing, external review and the school external review process.

## **5.5 Concluding Comment**

The context of this concluding comment was formulated on the findings that emerged in the study and which were divided into three sections: Phase One, Phase Two and a Cross-case analysis of the data that became evident in the two phases. The reviews of official documents, individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews and observations of the College Council of Heads (CCoH) meetings produced an interesting corpus of data and offered an insight into the various experiences that the participants lived through in the early years of the ongoing reforms that were spearheaded by a vision of a better future for Maltese students. The above presentation of the findings had suggested that the future expectations of the reforms did appear hopeful and optimistic, even though challenges, issues and concerns had been identified by several interviewees. The findings continued to show that the reform, which had underpinned collaboration and public participation, was bringing about new forms of inter- and intra-school working. At the same time the new forms of collaboration were in themselves stirring controversy and raising implications for the concepts of leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability relationships. The study helped to highlight that as the reform unfolded, the different stakeholders reacted in different ways given the particular circumstances, contexts and situations they found themselves in. Within such a scenario, whilst still too early to draw any conclusions, the overall feeling was a positive one indicating a strong sense of commitment and a desire to take on new responsibilities required by the reform.

The data I presented in Chapter 5 will be discussed and presented in Chapter 6, which follows.

## Chapter 6 – Discussion

### 6.0 Introduction

In this chapter I present the discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 5. I discuss the findings in the context of the literature review (Chapter 3), central to the four research questions of the study, and four key theoretical perspectives (Actor Network and Activity theories, Social Capital and Communities of Practice concepts). The four themes (collaboration, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing, and accountability relationships) are used as the classification model to organize the discussion chapter of this research. The gathered data is used to develop a heuristic, (see Appendix 5), which can help to elucidate the relationship of the data with the theoretical issues explored in the thesis and the outcomes. Hence, strengthen the contribution to knowledge made by the thesis.

The discussion presented in this chapter is divided into six main sections (each containing a number of sub-sections) headed by the introduction (6.0). The introduction is followed by a section that contextualises the study for the reader (Section 6.1). The content of the rest of the chapter is presented in four sections, each central to one primary theme and three subsidiary themes. The following is a short description of the content of the four sections:

- Section 6.2 central to the primary theme of Collaboration and networking, includes subsections on:
  - introduction;
  - inferences to the history of informal collaboration;
  - having intra- and inter-school collaboration;
  - controversy surrounding the current collaborative model;
  - collaboration and networking are beneficial;
  - challenges: issues and concerns;
  - from the cross-case analysis there emerged the following:
    - collaboration is not an easy venture;
    - unfair criticism levelled at school practitioners;
    - learning opportunities.
- Section 6.3 focuses on the subsidiary theme of Educational Leadership and Management, embodies the following subsections:
  - the concept of educational leadership and management and the dimension of these two roles;
  - leadership skills and styles;
  - challenges and concerns;
  - the cross-case analysis presented the following:
    - negotiating the centralisation-decentralisation tension;
    - distributed leadership;
    - leadership and professional development;
    - leadership – the human and moral dimensions.
- Section 6.4 presents a number of sub-themes around the subsidiary theme of Educational governance and governing:

- hierarchical structure of the directorates;
- hierarchical structure of the colleges;
- concerns;
- the sub-themes that follow emerge from the cross-case analysis:
  - issue of power;
  - the college board.
- Section 6.5 is central to the subsidiary theme of accountability relationships and embodies the following:
  - understanding accountability;
  - collective accountability;
  - challenges and concerns;
  - a cross-case analysis offers the following sub-themes;
    - allying commitment to accountability;
    - external and internal audits.
- Section 6.6 presents the concluding comment of the chapter.

## 6.1 Reforming the Maltese Educational System and its Schools

The review of the seminal document *For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta (FACTS)* (MEYE, 2005) demonstrates that Malta's Educational system demanded an overhaul if it was to be relevant to future generations of students (Borg, 2005; Galea, 2005 and Mizzi, 2005). Reforms are aimed at challenging and empowering one and all. They challenge our mind-set, our theories and practices, and focus our attention on the kind of teaching and learning environment we want to create in our schools. They empower us as we engage with self and others to review and create new opportunities which maximise output across the board. The central aim of the proposed reforms is to equip the Maltese Islands with an education system and schools that can provide quality education, which caters for the specific needs of the students (Galea, 2005). Providing quality education for all Maltese students requires the implementation of reforms and changes, which need to be enthused and sustained through a collaborative effort (Galea, 2005).

Fullan's (2001) claims that change and reforms gain support when stakeholders work on improving relationships. Fullan (2007) expands this concept when he claims that today change agents are focusing on '*group development*' (p.4) so that change will be a success. Such an outlook is also underlined by what Lacey and Ranson (1994, p.79) suggest when they say that:

The advantage of collaboration (between schools) lies in the benefit it brings directly to pupils, particularly that their needs are viewed as a whole.'

Both the seminal document FACTS (MEYE, 2005) and *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327*. (Laws of Malta, 2006) highlight the introduction of a comprehensive reform that is to overhaul the overly 'top down' bureaucratic system of Maltese education and the grouping of all State Schools into ten regional Colleges. The changes are intended to bring about a transformation in the way educators relate to and work with each other, which resonates the communities of practice theory as espoused by Wenger-Trayner (1998). The changes are intended to establish also a strong orientation to collective values, particularly the way decision making is undertaken, to a collective

sense of responsibility and accountability. Hence, Maltese education can go forward and remain relevant to the global changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

FACTS (2005) argues that by designing our state school system round networks we can help *all* children to succeed and educate young people for the unprecedented global society that awaits them when they come of age. The document envisages that, through networking, schools can be in a better and stronger position to meet the needs of Maltese students because they will work in partnership with one another, share resources, jointly solve problems and create new practices within the specific and particular context of a group of schools forming one whole unit. Hence, embracing the activity theory as developed by Vygotsky in the 1930s (Holt and Morris, 1993). Bezzina (2008, p.22) argues that '(t)oday, more than ever before, we do appreciate that building a community of learners is essential to any school reform effort.'

Networks may call for collaborative work practices, yet they still encourage individuality, creativity, spontaneity and originality. The provisions of *The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006*, (Laws of Malta, 2006) which underline the realisation of both collaboration and distinctiveness, also present us with possibilities and challenges. It is central to the argument to point out that while in the past the Maltese education system was mainly centralised, State-maintained schools had enjoyed some form of negotiating powers. Consequently, as Stoll and Fink (2003, p.19) argue, 'the schools have become the centre of change rather than the objects of managed change.' How far this will take us will be seen as the years unfold and we continue to gain experience in handling the various challenges that confront us.

## **6.2 Primary Theme – Collaboration**

### **6.2.1 Introduction**

Collaboration is a challenging word that we have come to realise that it can mean and be interpreted in different ways within the policy context that we are living. One appreciates that the whole notions of collaboration, cooperation, working together are words that have surfaced recently on the international scene, and more so locally and underline both the Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) and Activity Theory (Engeström, 1999). Considering the Maltese Educational setting these concepts have been with us since the inception of the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) (Ministry of Education, 1999). Hall, (1999, p.50) states that:

There is evidence everywhere of new partnerships in educational provision accompanied inevitably by the tensions created by predispositions and contexts as a result of the new and often unfamiliar combinations of people working together.

### **6.2.2 Inferences to the History of Informal Collaboration**

In this research, spread over two phases, I collected data from all the schools of four Colleges. A strong theme that emerges from the corpus of data is that there existed some sense of intra- and inter-school joint working process. The narratives and discourse of the interviewees highlight the notion that informal intra- and inter- school collaboration exists in some instances and not in all. The data also shows that teachers do attempt to work together on curricular matters and syllabi and to do the best work they can. However, this too is there in some instances and not in all. Again, in some instances, there exists some form of unofficial inter-school collaboration among the Heads of School; mainly the sharing of resources. However, both forms of joint working are not the modus operandi of

the stakeholders. The need to standardize an intra- and inter-school collaborative modus operandi within and among state schools on the Maltese Islands is recognised by the Minister of Education and even policy makers who have insisted that people need to work together, particularly Heads of School and teachers. The Minister and policy makers believe that Heads and teachers need to nurture a culture of intra- and inter-school collaboration with their school associates and their counterparts from other schools so as to improve the way children learn. This is reinforced by Part V articles 51(d); 55(a) and 56(1) of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006), which highlights the need to cultivate a collegial mind-set among professional educators.

### ***6.2.3 Having Intra- and Inter-school Collaboration***

#### ***1. Maintaining a collaborative way of working***

Overall, the participants' narratives and discourse on the theme of collaboration addresses the concepts of intra- and inter-school collaboration. The data highlights the interviewees' insight into intra- and inter-school collaboration and how this underscores the significance of building collaboration within and between schools. It also suggests that the idea of working collaboratively needs to be maintained, as argued by Ritzer (2004) when discussing the concept of activity theory. Failure to do this can be decisive and the reform will be short lived. Stakeholders' concern can be attributed to their understanding that they will be missing out on what Stoll and Fink (2003, p.142) refer to as 'the rich interaction with peers in other schools.'

#### ***2. The essential ingredients of commitment and trust***

The nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools needs to be founded on commitment and trust. Acknowledging and then engaging in sustaining commitment to the ongoing reforms founded on trust is central because establishing a school network trust among the stakeholders '...glues together a mass of individual agency so it can become collective action...' (Hadfield and Chapman; 2009, p.30) Trust among the respective stakeholders, whose significance is highlighted by Ferragina, (2012) when she speaks about the modern social capital conceptualization; is central to reinforcing and maintaining a sense of common commitment to the shared endeavour. It can help the concerned individuals understand that being committed to collaboration and teamwork can possibly warrant the success of the college reform.

Lieberman and Wood (2004) maintain that the members of a group have to understand that in forming a learning community they are actually learning how to be members of a democratic community that not only values their knowledge and their continued growth but also values them. When Maltese teachers are ready to acknowledge the benefits of intra- and inter-school collaboration, what they stand to gain from it, they will be able to believe in it and own it. Research (Stoll and Fink, 2003) supports the belief that teachers have to be committed to any form of educational change if this change is to move from strength to strength. Maltese educational practitioners must believe in the reforms and own them if this cultural and structural paradigm shift is to gain strength.

### ***6.2.4 Controversy Surrounding the Current Collaborative Model***

Acknowledging the complex nature of human beings, it is not surprising that transforming Maltese State-maintained schools into educational networks and having their professional stakeholders forming joint working organisations is bound to be problematic. Consequently, the nature of networking becomes rather intricate (Hatfield and Chapman, 2009). Given that networking can be a complex process and fused by the debate that ensued locally, fostering intra- and inter-school joint working proves to be controversial. There are those who argue that if educators are to implement the proposals set-out in FACTS, (MEYE, 2005) they have to work as a group and so underline working together.



On the other hand, there are those who are sceptical about any form of success for the reform and consequently are not ready to embrace the changes that the reforms brought on

### *1. Managing change*

Literature (Fullan, 2007; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009; Hall, 1999 and Marris, 1975) claims that it is natural for reforms to provoke an atmosphere of apprehension and consequently resistance to change, particularly because of the possibility of imposition, misconceived perceptions about their purpose and the timeframe in which they are applied and actualized. Fullan (2007, p.21) makes this case convincingly by referring to Marris (1975), who in Fullan's words claims 'that all real change involves loss, anxiety, and struggle.' Fullan (2007, p.21) continues to argue about this notion and what it means failing to understand the effects of change when he claims that:

Failure to recognize this phenomenon as natural and inevitable has meant that we tend to ignore important aspects of change and misinterpret others.

Considering the overall response of the interviewees, in this regard, I think that the momentum of change seems to create in itself a problem, more so when taking into account the dynamics of the human factor and the probability of creating fear, as Hadfield and Chapman (2009, p.81) claim in their research when they state that: 'Another barrier was identified as being the fear of change...' We have to appreciate that people have to grow into this philosophy of working with others, of being a member of a team. Considering that an individual can work well in one group, but not in another group I dare say that some individuals will find it difficult getting there and others will never get there; an opinion that resonates in the words of one policy maker:

Experience has taught me that certain individuals will only work alone and they are very good at that. Our schools have some outstanding Heads and teachers who are exceptional on their own, but then do not tell to work with others because they can destroy the group.

Life's experiences demonstrate that human diversity makes human beings a complex dynamic and consequently, school leaders may need to give more attention to that dynamic. In view of the complexity of the human mind I can understand the Minister's comment that 'encouraging schools and colleges to collaborate will be in itself a major challenge'. If stakeholders are to discover ways of turning a problem into a challenge they may need to ask themselves: If I am ready to take up the challenge, does it mean that I believe and am ready to own the reform? Getting people to engage in joint working can very well prove to be a challenge, more so when Hadfield and Chapman (2009, p.28) admit that 'getting individuals to work collectively towards a shared aim requires specific skills of mobilisation and the cultural skills of coherence making'.

## ***6.2.5 Collaboration and Networking are Beneficial***

### *1. School improvement*

Research has shown that the study of networks is a diverse field of enquiry and that networks pay dividends. Literature (Chapman, 2008; Hargreaves, 2003b; Little, 2005; Richmond, 1996; Stoll and Fink, 2003) provide some evidence that networks may have the edge in helping schools meet the responsibilities accredited to them by society. Additionally researchers, (Bienzle and Jütte, 2008; Lieberman, 1999) expound the argument that educational networks are needed to produce change and improvement in schools. Not only that, but according to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995)

and McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) networks foster a new *raison d'être* that produce change and improvement in schools.

Considering the above research and certain data, I believe that Maltese educators (whether at the Directorates, the colleges or schools) need to work with one another, listen to others and collaborate because they stand to gain. The notion that networking and collaborating offers gain to the actors and their organization is demonstrated by social capital (Ferragina, 2012). As the findings establishes, networking and collaboration can help facilitate horizontal and vertical linkages between schools from early childhood to Form 5. Consequently, collective commitment and the sharing of best practices can be disseminated amongst schools and the wider community, which can improve pupil achievement Chapman and Fullan (2007).

The data continues to draw attention to the notion that the model of the Head of School or the teacher working in isolation, distant from others, safeguarding the belief that this is my school, this is my classroom could have been appropriate in the past, but now it is no longer viable particularly when considering the reforms that global education was undergoing, as highlighted by Chapman *et al.* (2010). All State schools in Malta and Gozo were clustered into ten networks and each given the nomenclature of a college. The rationale behind the college concept is intra- and inter-school joint-working; with the governing body of the Council of Heads.

## *2. Collaboration fosters combined energy*

Collaboration, which translates itself into combined energy, will have stakeholders synergising and hence forming 'communities of practice' Wenger-Trayner (2006). Advocating synergy underlines the theory of collaborative advantage as Huxham and Vangen, (2004) expound. One of the central concepts to this theory is that the notion of collaborative advantage captures the synergy argument. In sum, interviewees are growing conscious of the fast-changing educational landscape, both on the local and international scene. Overall they contend that collaboration is crucial in sustaining change and the on-going execution of educational policies as laid down in the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) Considering the policy context that Maltese educators are living, the discourse of the interviewees concede that Heads of School can no longer be individuals simply running their school but need to work together to sustain the rationale and ethos of their college. Joint working gives them strength and empowers them to strengthen and improve any current form of collaborative practice in a policy context so that all stakeholders can feel the need to synergise and work together (Chapman *et al.*, 2010).

A significant number of responses, particularly by teachers, seem to advocate the College Reform and the form of collaboration that the policy context fosters or reinforces where it already exists. Considering the findings I can acknowledge with a certain amount of confidence that joint working is becoming a significant feature of the professional practice of many Maltese educators. A number of collaborative exemplars, evidenced in a number of colleges, demonstrate the practice of joint working. The recorded data also helps me perceive how the new way of working is impacting individuals, in that it becomes a learning curve for all professional educators, hence resonating the basic premise of activity theory (Holt and Morris, 1993). Many of the interviewees concur that certain colleagues, renowned for their preference to work in isolation, were learning to share, to be challenged and to challenge. It emerges that the college reform is making stakeholders aware that they can work better since it is making them create a forum of debate. Consequently, collaboration can pay dividends because of the synergy it is creating.

*a. A Collaborative exemplar – College Council of Heads*

The College Council of Heads is a network of people set-up within each College whose remit is to collectively discuss, share experiences, make decisions, plan and implement for their College. Considering the findings, I think that instituting a Council of Heads for every college is central to the sustainability of the college reform, since the group brings all the Heads of the particular college together to decide collaboratively the way forward, hence resonating the definition given by Bourdieu (1986) on social capital. The data and the remit of the Heads on the Council, as sanctioned in the Act, shows that coming together to explore new avenues in order to foster: effective collegiality and have them sharing good practices, knowledge and expertise, demonstrates that local education is beginning to move away from the isolationist model. Furthermore, having observed Council of Heads meetings, I think that these Councils are relatively both a good showcase of educational and academic collaboration and also serve as an opportunity for socializing because they seem to bridge the distance between one school and another. This network of Heads is developing ways of working together in mutually supportive ways using the diversity within and across the schools as a positive force of knowledge sharing and innovation.

### **6.2.6 Challenges: Issues and Concerns**

The data illustrates that the educational change process can be rather complicated, daunting and has the possibility of creating friction among the stakeholders, a point that Fullan (2007, p.18) corroborates when he claims that ‘the process of educational reform is much more complex than had been anticipated.’ The nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools, as expected, was cause for debate. The varied responses indicate that not all interviewees recognise the benefits that networks and collaboration create. Certain stories together with what is happening locally makes me recognise the incidence of issues and concerns stemming from the implementation of the current model of collaboration. I come to understand that the college reform is chequered by progress and lull. Certain data also helps me recognise that fostering and sustaining a collaborative way of working is, in certain instances, becoming an uphill struggle.

The complexity reform process runs the risk of having multiple views as to how the different stakeholders view the collaborative model espoused by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). Whilst some are working to ensure that the collaborative model is institutionalised others may militate against it. The implication is that the considerable gains achieved can possibly be threatened by fears of having individuals criticising the model of intra- and inter-school joint working. These varying mind-sets seem to highlight also the possibility that people can be getting tired quickly because of: the level of change or rather the momentum of change; and being asked to do things that were not conceptualised fifteen or twenty years ago. The question that arises is: Can it be that the alarmingly unusual way that the rate of change is taking place, the profession of educational leaders and teachers is becoming more strenuous? To this effect many of the responses, particularly Heads of School, complain of burn out. The findings suggest that because of the way scenarios are shifting locally and internationally, the demands on the profession are intensifying.

#### *1. Collaboration versus isolation*

The importance of aligning Maltese Education with its European counterparts underscores the importance of having a networking approach that fosters and sustains collaboration among schools (Chapman, 2008) and failure to collaborate, stakeholders can very well miss out on ‘the rich interaction with peers in other schools’ (Stoll and Fink; 2003, p.142). Such failure to collaborate can demonstrate the attitude of the members towards their network; that is, the members are not faithful to the network (Ritzer, 2004).

The data shows concurrence that working in isolation may have been appropriate in the past but in our globalised world, there is a need to work and learn as a team, to collaborate in order to be successful in an environment that values competitiveness. The collective action of the community will become an indicator of increased social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Local school practitioners, like their international counterparts, need to form communities of practice, which have been globally acknowledged to be a key to improving performance (Wenger-Trayner, 2006 and DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The drive to involve stakeholders in the implementation of the reforms appears to be strong among policy makers. They acknowledge the need to consult more, to obtain feedback from stakeholders so as to help them establish a collaborative policy initiative. However, this seems entirely contrary to what the teachers' data and the study by Borg and Giordmaina (2012) suggest, which indicate a strong sense of disgruntlement among teachers for lack of consultation.

### ***6.2.7 The Cross-Case Analysis***

In this section of the discussion around the primary theme of collaboration I look at the cross-case analysis of the data where I bring together the sub-themes that emerge in the two phases of the research. The analysis yields an incidence of commonality around a number of sub-themes (the above mentioned six sub-themes and, were relevant, their subsidiary sub-themes. The cross-case analysis made evident three sub-themes that emerge only in the second phase of the study. The outcome suggests that three years after the sanctioning of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) there are a number of developments that are taking place and are bearing fruition. Whilst the process of reform is still under way one already notes changes of opinions and attitudes in certain aspects as the stakeholders engage with the different expectations set by the authorities or the Colleges themselves. The three identified sub-themes follow:

#### ***1. Collaboration is not an easy venture***

The data suggests that maintaining the praxis of intra- and inter-school collaboration can be problematic and can very well determine the longevity of the ongoing changes evolving due to the reform. The cruel reality is that if such issue is not taken seriously, problems may arise that put into jeopardy the successful implementation of the reform. The prospect of ever having the scenario of failing to understand the concept of teamwork and shared endeavour is not improbable, a notion that is supported by the reservations of some heads of school and teachers who, even though they fully support the College reform, exhibit a certain degree of scepticism. A number of Heads of Primary schools advocate the need to be realistic whilst expressing the commitment to improve 'individual, team and organisational capacities' (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009, p.104) in order to sustain this new collaborative endeavour. There is concurrence on the need to reflect because there can ensue a scenario where, on one hand, you have the ambitious individuals/group that is willing to work as a team and on the other hand others who would not be able to work with colleagues and peers. Such individuals/group can be reluctant to collaborate because they can be apprehensive that working collaboratively with others can expose, in certain instances, their leadership and professional inadequacies.

#### ***2. Unfair criticism levelled at school practitioners***

FACTS (MEYE, 2005) highlights the objective of the ongoing reforms; bringing a shift from a highly centralised system controlling and servicing stand-alone schools to a decentralised system giving local State schools more autonomy. The need to transform an organized system established on a hierarchical, apex governed structure is acknowledged by policy makers and the Central Authorities. They believe that real change can happen when people realise that they need to work in a different way. However, change is a daunting task (Fullan, 2007), particularly when the structural and the system change proposed needs to be complemented with a paradigm shift in mind-set and attitude.

Furthermore, as Fullan (2001) argues, successful change demands improvement of relationships. The implication is that change requires working in collaboration and cooperation with each other, particularly between the Directorates and the grass-roots at school level.

The data shows that teachers feel affronted and hence outraged at the inappropriate remarks levelled at them by education officials, particularly that school practitioners tend to show an attitude of indifference towards sustaining the ongoing reforms. The truth of the matter is that teachers feel disheartened because they were not consulted about the proposed reforms, particularly when they are the ones who will be implementing the changes. The implication is that such lack of connection between the Central Authorities and the school practitioners, fails to foster social capital (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009). Furthermore, failing to access the knowledge of the teachers, so useful to the reforms, suggests that policy makers may have failed to take advantage of the intellectual capital (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009) of the teachers. As Stoll and Fink (2003, p.73) argue: 'Since educational change depends on teachers' commitment, teacher involvement is essential to the success of a change effort.'

### *3. Learning opportunities*

A desired positive outcome of the College reform is an expected increase in curricular collaboration and cooperation. The provisions in the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) that incorporate the majority of the proposals in FACTS (MEYE, 2005) sanction the allotment of space on the schools' timetables for teachers to meet, discuss curricular and teaching methodologies, to plan collaborative endeavours for self and school improvement, and to share good practices. However, there is a missing denominator; the personnel to substitute the teachers. Such a missing element suggests that since certain 'objects' (in our case peripatetic teachers) are missing the 'outcome' will not be reached (Engeström, 1999). Hence, the current reforms have not been instrumental in reinforcing the existing informal curricular collaboration and fostering a stronger collaborative and collegial culture. Teachers, across the studied four colleges, feel that the time and space for the sharing of good practice in teaching very often is not made possible at the school level and hardly at all at the college level.

It may be the case that the required levels of statutory collaborative endeavour fails to be attained at the time of my research because the College Reform is still in its embryonic phase because of a missing link in structure that will facilitate regularly the weekly ninety minute slot for curricular development. Teachers do not seem to have enough time to meet so as to discuss, seek grounds for collaboration and interaction, and share experiences and expertise. In this case, the logistics of the timetable, which appear defective from the onset, are proving to be a barrier to intra- and inter-school collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. The release of primary school teachers from their classroom, to attend the weekly ninety minute curricular session, hinges on the availability of the peripatetic teachers to replace the class teachers. The fact that such meetings cannot be held regularly is becoming an issue and a concern for both teachers and Heads of School. Furthermore, the educational implications behind the withdrawal of the class teacher, once the peripatetic teacher arrives at the school implies that the teacher is now going to forfeit from learning through the expertise of others. This has originally been the intent behind the use of the peripatetic staff in primary schools.

## **6.3 Subsidiary Theme – Educational Leadership and Management**

### ***6.3.1 The Concept of Educational Leadership and Management***

By and large, most societies regard schools as social and educational agencies (Stoll and Fink, 2003) that have been entrusted with the responsibility to utilise their vast knowledge and experience to help

children in the process of becoming knowledgeable and mature functional members within their society. They are expected to be effectively prepared (Sergiovanni, 2005) so as to respond to the demands of society. Among the many core objectives of Maltese Education, and the global education system for that matter, one finds that education transmits and develops knowledge and culture from one generation to the next, promotes respect for learning, broadens horizons and develops high expectations. Above all, it empowers individual students with the skills that will enable them to learn further throughout life and take full part in society (Hopkins, 2005).

The people that are critical and responsible for progress, particularly the on-going reforms, are the leaders of Maltese schools and of the newly set-up colleges. Outstanding and effective school leaders are considered by many interviewees (policy makers and teachers) crucial to the success of schools and their students, an observation that finds support in studies by Bennett *et al.* (2006); Chapman (2005) and Dean (2007 who cites Rosenholtz 1989). School leaders play a critical and important role in developing a vision for a high-quality education for every student and in implementing and supporting a learning environment that is developed and shared by key stakeholders. Hence one of the implications on educational leadership due to the form of collaboration outlined by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) is that school leaders need to focus on building a culture of collegiality and collaboration among students, educators and stakeholders. Moreover, some interviewees call for a drive away from the spirit of isolation that surrounds the practices of Maltese school practitioners to one grounded in joint-working. Hence, we need to be cautious and tread carefully especially when considering that the attempt to establish the concept of collaboration as crucial, for leadership remains ‘complex and contested’ Morrison and Arthur (2013, p.179). Crowther *et al.* (2002) and Reeves (2010) argue that educational leaders need to motivate their members of staff so they will sustain the school’s vision, which in turn becomes somewhat their quest. Groups need to work together in order to identify their strengths based on their expertise and experiences and eventually from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and collective accountability, as espoused by ‘activity theory’ (Engeström 1988, cited by Holt and Morris 1993). Naturally, activities in groups need to be formative and developmental in purpose, which will allow members to build both their strengths and address their weaknesses. However, we all need to remain focused because amid the gathering momentum of reform activity it is relatively easy to lose sight of the major goal of reform: improving the quality of schooling to ensure that all children will succeed.

### *1. The dimension of educational leadership and management roles*

The discourse of the interviewees makes me aware that there is a healthy mix regarding the debate between educational leadership and management; whether they are interlinked or distinct concepts. Such varied opinion between these two dimensions found support in research (Bush, 2008; Bush and Clover 2003; Hallinger, 2003) who consider them not only interlinked but deem them central to the growing challenges and demands that schools have constantly had to grapple with. The data makes me reflect on the concept of leadership and helps me recognise that it is a relationship that takes place within a context; hence there is a contextual relationship. Leadership emerges also as the combination of contradictions; such as, problems and opportunities or frustration and fulfilment among others that I think are touched by the managerialist schedule (Bush, 2008).

Conversely, and corroborating other studies (Bolam, 1999; Crawford, 2002; and Day *et al.*, 2001), certain interviewees distinguish between leadership and management. It seems that the contrasting discourse of the two cohorts of interviewees, and as suggested also by the above literature together with what is presented in Chapter 3, provokes the notion that the demarcation line between educational leadership and management is a contentious issue because the distinction may be rather imprecise.

### **6.3.2 Leadership Skills and Styles**

#### ***1. Effective and visionary leadership***

Considering the post-2006 Maltese educational context, the challenge facing us was definitely one of effective leadership and good school managers. When all is said and done, leadership comes down to performance. Principals and Heads, as indicated by the recorded narratives and discourse, can demonstrate their prowess, first and foremost through high profile activities such as vision setting and strategic planning. A leader can set the vision by listening, understanding and motivating. S/he can then forge that vision by incorporating the ideas, talents and energies of others. Leaders increase a group's productivity by helping everyone in the group become more effective, and hence sustain the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) that they lead. Leadership is all about being inclusive. Effective leaders bring out the best in others (Chapman, 2005).

Having such leadership calls for the need of transformational leaders, which finds support in Bottery, (2004) and Sergiovanni (2005), who make a case for leadership incentive in being the driving force behind the stimuli that motivates people to change. Having transformational leaders is another implication emanating from the collaboration central to the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). Consequently, Principals and Heads, the leaders and managers of the State-maintained Maltese colleges and schools, need to address and understand both the practical issues and the underlying consequences of the culture change that the educators they lead will have to cope with.

#### ***2. Leaders as change agents***

The more experienced and mature interviewed educators claim that a major concern that needs to be addressed is the shift from a prescriptive to a more collaborative, participatory model implying that people will have to change. Although they are conscious that to survive they need to change, they also appear to envisage a certain degree of apprehension at being unable to control and prevail over their uneasiness. As literature (Fullan, 2007; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009) implies, individuals can find it difficult to come forward and ask for help. Acknowledging the fact that change will create difficulties, I believe that it is equally important to ensure that change related problems would not be disregarded. Understanding and contending with the problems, as Fullan (1995) argues will help in finding solutions and consequently registering success.

A pragmatic approach to such a potential demoralizing hurdle can lie in nurturing, in the leaders of Maltese schools and colleges, the practice to develop an effective monitoring system, maybe even, mentoring systems so people can open up with someone they feel comfortable with. Consequently, this asks for leaders who understand how crucial it is to recognise the significance of the humane and moral dimensions in dealing with others. Such inferences make the issue of change appear more complex and challenging (Fullan, 2007), which reinforces my perception that having effective leaders in place is central to the sustainability of the reform of collaboration and building relationships.

#### ***3. Forging and sustaining intra- and inter-school relationships***

State-maintained Maltese educational institutions and their practitioners are living the on-going experience of formulating and implementing educational reform. Hence, current and future educational leaders will most likely be burdened with huge and considerable demands in terms of understanding and appreciating diversity. However, understanding diversity will not be easy particularly when considering that leaders' understanding of diversity displays, as Lumby and Coleman (2007) argue, an array of different interpretations. The current Maltese context requires

having innovative leaders; leaders who believe in collaboration and can thus forge and sustain intra- and inter-school working.

Research (Chapman and Fullan, 2007; Chapman, 2008 and Stoll and Fink, 2003) acknowledges the importance of joint working. Developing and sustaining a collaborative relationship calls for a move away from the spirit of isolation that surrounds the current practices of a number of Heads and teachers, which means nurturing colleges into communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner, 1998). Leading others to collaborate and sustain a collegial relationship requires local college and school leaders to understand the importance of being eager to change (Horner, 2006). Only when College, school and classroom leaders understand fully the meaning of building a school collaborative culture will they be able to find ways of engaging with the school as a learning community that will provide space for discussion. Consequently, a collegial culture among the professional school practitioners will materialize and as Barth (1990) argues, build and influence the success of a school. Hence, producing the 'outcome' element displayed in Engeström's (1999) Activity System's model (see fig. 3.2). Literature, (Gratton, 2000; Kaplan and Norton, 2001 and Connolly and James 2006) discusses and demonstrates the importance of such culture transformation. However, the implication is a re-culturing process for Maltese educators, which means changing attitudes, norms, skills and how we perceive joint working so as to transform the current form of collaboration, where it exists informally, and nurture a new way of working as a team.

#### *4. Shared leadership*

I recognise the possibility of other implications for Maltese leadership in the context of collaboration within a policy framework unless local college and school leaders will recognise and will be able to share responsibility, and offer their teachers, the parents and the students the opportunity to work together to improve their educational institution. Reflecting on James *et al.*'s (2007, p.544) stance that the benefits of collaboration 'are underpinned by the requirements for additional resources and/or legitimacy', we assume, that collaboration and collegiality may serve the stakeholders of the colleges and schools. When school leaders give centre stage to building strong collegial relationships among their members of staff and lead them to work as teams they will, as Chapman (2005, p.150) claims in his study, be creating 'a professional learning community that promotes the generation and sharing of knowledge for all.' They will be giving legitimacy to the professional dimension of their leadership. Furthermore, when Heads and teachers understand that working together will help them make a very substantial contribution to collaboration, will they be able to the new collaborative *modus operandi*. There is status to be gained from that. There is legitimacy in what they do. Learning to appreciate that this new way of shared leadership will enhance stakeholders as a learning organization and help them overcome a redundant sense of professional isolation. Senge (2006) describes such learning organizations as a group of people who are continually enhancing their capabilities and creating new ones over time.

### **6.3.3 Challenges and Concerns**

#### *1. Decentralisation – A challenge for some*

The implementation of decentralisation (not wide spread and rather a slow process in the course of the study) highlighting the notion of devolving more powers to the college and school site, will unfortunately create challenges for those practitioners who know only the meaning of a prescriptive model of authority. Such interviewed practitioners, who feel comfortable and confident with what they have and not with the unknown because they feel secure in that old system, will feel more apprehensive about the whole educational reform, than the new crop of young educators. Literature, (Fullan, 2007; Senge, 1990; Foreman, 1998 and Sergiovanni, 2006) and certain data tend to corroborate my argument. A cohort of seasoned interviewees, in sum, seems to argue that having



worked within a centralised system throughout their teaching career feel a sense of security within the system because it served them well. Considering that the system worked well they question the need for change. Considering such an outlook, it is only natural to anticipate that the reforms will create tension, which can have repercussions on classroom teaching.

### *2. Overloaded management role*

The College reform regrettably generates an increase in activities, other than the ones that have been taking place. Although college and school activities enhance the school experience of the students, too much of it can defeat the purpose. Indeed, evidence shows that the overloading of the extracurricular domain is leaving Heads of School and teachers experiencing burnout. Consequently, it is impacting their school and classroom duties respectively and leaving them demoralised and demotivated; an observation that finds support in Fullan (1995) and Hargreaves (2004). Heads of School feel that at times they have to make undesirable choices for the school and its teachers. They have to choose between participating in extracurricular projects and covering syllabus content. Heads complain that having to make such choices is creating for them undue stress. I believe that this can be avoided if the Directorates short list the projects and promote only a practical and realistic number that can be carried out without upsetting too much the curricular programme of the teachers. Having to participate in an unreasonable number of college and school activities is leaving teachers little room for the implementation of the syllabi.

### *3. The college micro-politics*

Heads of School and teachers feel that decentralisation of leadership roles is at best artificial. They feel that when the policy makers created the new post of College Principal they were simply crafting another notch in the administrative hierarchy. They say that in many instances the Directorates are manifested in the Principal. The Directorates have transferred certain powers to the College leader and once again matters stop there. The leaders of schools claim that they have limited authority because they have to refer everything to the Principal for approval. They share their concern that their superiors are living in an ivory tower. They also refer to the issue around the Education Leaders Council (ELC). Heads claim that the function of the ELC reinforces the notion that decentralisation is at best artificial; particularly when very often they attend the Council of Heads meeting with pre-drawn agenda, and it is only occasionally that they get the opportunity to discuss matters related to their schools. Such line of argument can be interpreted as the idea of 'my school'. However, if Heads are allowed to present school related problems at the Council of Heads meeting they are being given the opportunity of having the opportunity to bounce off ideas from the colleagues. The current situation implies that this opportunity is very often missed. However, here one needs to be careful because the Heads can use social capital to advance the prospects of the school they lead; a possibility that Portes (1998) refers to as a negative consequence of social capital.

### **6.3.4 The Cross-Case Analysis**

In this section of the chapter that develops around the secondary theme of educational leadership and management, I present the relatively new sub-themes that emerge only in Phase Two of the study. Analysing the findings means bringing together the sub-themes that emerge in the two phases of the research. The analysis of the data collected from both phases yields a number of sub-themes and, where relevant, subsidiary sub-themes that emerge in both phases, and also relatively new sub-themes that emerge only in Phase Two of the study. Four new sub-themes emerge from the cross-case analysis of the research. The results of this analysis suggest that three years after the sanctioning of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) there are aspects that are developing whilst changes in opinions and attitudes being observed in others. The four identified sub-themes follow:

### *1. Negotiating the Centralisation-Decentralisation Tension*

Pre-1999, the Maltese Education system has always been primarily centralised and its approach to decision policy making, particularly in curriculum development, has been top heavy. Joseph (2002, p.64) in his paper argues that 'curriculum development is centralised' in the majority of small states in the world. Malta is no exception.

The concept of a decentralised system for Maltese Education was introduced in the Education Act of 1988 (Laws of Malta 1988) and reinforced in the Act of 2006 (Laws of Malta, 2006). Unfortunately, the application of its praxis, as indicated by a substantial number of interviewees, is still being very much regulated by the Directorates. Hence, in certain aspects of the reforms, the opportunity to create a fully functional decentralised system, which will have relinquished stronger powers to the schools, seems to have been missed. How authority and control will be negotiated, is still to be seen.

#### *a. A genuine form of decentralisation*

Within this context of change and reform, educators are being asked to adapt and adopt a new philosophy and praxis. It is clear that if the Maltese Education system is to keep up with our global counterparts, we have to move away from our conservative and bureaucratic system of centralisation. Decentralisation as Dempster and Logan (1998) point out helps to free schools from centralised bureaucratic control. Interviewed policy makers firmly entertain the notion that while particular responsibilities can and, in time, will be devolved to the colleges and schools, the Directorates will retain their overall control. This does not augur well for decentralisation knowing that the Maltese system cannot be transformed totally and completely from a centralised one.

Such is the bone of contention that the reform has to face. At the moment the Central Authorities (in this respect the Maltese Government) do not want to relinquish their hold on policy making amongst other things. This contrasts with developments in European and other countries where their governments are decentralizing responsibilities and accountability at lower levels. However, remaining hopeful, a possible avenue can be to create a genuine partnership between our schools and the Directorates, unlike the current artificial one. Creating a balance supported by strong Directorates that sets standards in schools and among practitioners, ready to evolve greater responsibilities to the schools and making them aware of the environment they form part, is central to the success of the reform. Considering the findings there may be the possibility of having a semi-centralised model. The implication is that the Directorates establish a vision for Maltese colleges and schools, and offer support to the colleges and schools as they address their goals. Considering that we have had what may be called a weak centralised system because the Central Authorities, very often, did not know what was happening in the periphery (in the schools), what teaching and learning was taking place in the respective schools and classrooms; then having a semi-centralised education system makes sense.

### *2. Distributed leadership*

Considering the collected data (Chapter 5) and the reviewed literature (Chapter 3), I think that creating and developing relationships is not going to be necessarily easy. I realise that leaders have to challenge and move away from the conventional model of leadership that has epitomised emphatically the notion of a single individual, who is the beginning and the end of school life. The leadership model that the reforms project is that of distributed and shared leadership, a leadership that does not focus on a single leader who is in charge of everything in the school but on the distribution and sharing. This is corroborated not only by Hadfield and Chapman (2009) but also by Spillane (2006) who argues that effective leadership is the end result of joint working between school leaders and their

stakeholders. Joseph (2002) also believes that leadership responsibilities have to infiltrate and involve even the teachers. However, one also needs to tread cautiously with distributed leadership because unless it is applied properly it will not bear fruition (Bottery, 2004).

Leaders of Maltese colleges and schools need to recognise not only their strengths but have to start acknowledging and accepting their weaknesses. Leaders of colleges, schools and even classrooms, for that matter, need to move away from the notion that they are the be-all and end-all of college, school or classroom. Reaching this stage will allow them to be comfortable in delegating responsibilities to others who prove to be more capable in identified areas. Again in distributing responsibilities and fostering distributed leadership one needs to be cautious because it can develop into a kind of school or college micro-politics between leaders and their staff (Law, 2010), particularly if leaders try to distribute responsibilities but want to retain absolute authority.

### *3. Leadership and professional development programmes*

What is certain is that the success of reforms in education usually hinges on a number of fundamental factors, particularly having professionally trained leaders of colleges and schools and the other educators at the school sites. Reviewing the current training programmes for our educational leaders can as Hadfield and Chapman (2009, p.153) argue, ‘challenge the orthodoxy of leadership identity... by creating learning contexts that counterbalance strong professional identities.’ Educators, particularly Heads, do not feel appropriately prepared for the challenges that the on-going reforms are generating. They are conscious that as a result the process of transformation and ownership can suffer, particularly since professionally trained leaders can be effective because they can give Maltese schools clear educational direction as Bush (2008) and Moorosi and Bush (2011) claim. Moreover, other researchers, (e.g. Bennett *et al.*, 2006; Moorosi and Bush, 2011; Rubin, 2009; Senge, 2006 and Sergiovanni, 2005) argue that the appropriate training will have a cascading beneficial effect on the whole school, right down to the learner.

### *4. Leadership – the human and moral dimensions*

Additionally, the pulse of the interviewees, particularly that of teachers, beat around the belief that school leaders show their worth by the way they behave in defining moments, those critical occasions when they have to deal with people. Chapman (2005, p.142) in his paper: *Building Leadership Capacity for School Improvement – A case study* states:

The focus on achievement is combined with recognition of the importance of people and valuing them. The Headteacher and senior management team... recognise that people are the key to improvement and they must be valued....

Thus, as argued also by Hoerr (2005), leadership is about relationships. It is not simply about projecting a vision and getting results but it is also about treating people with dignity and respect, with common decency and humanity. Processes and procedures may denote one as a manager, but his behaviour with people will reveal his leadership quality and skills. As the interviewed respondents, particularly teachers, indicate we need charismatic and transformational leaders, who underline creative, collaborative co-leadership, who appreciate the need for relationships and changing working patterns. Dominant among the opinion that emerges is that leaders of schools need to view leadership as an outcome of interpersonal relationships founded on trust and openness, a claim that finds support in Bush (2011); Chapman (2005); Greenfield (1991); Hoerr (2005) and Sergiovanni (2005) who recognise the moral dimension as a fundamental quality of leadership. The issue of trust as the interviewees articulate echoes the modern social capital concept as espoused by Ferragina, (2012).

## **6.4 Subsidiary Theme – Educational Governance and Governing**

### **6.4.1 The Hierarchical Structure of the Directorates**

The subsidiary theme of educational governance and governing also produced some significant findings. The issue of governance receives its fair share of attention in the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006), primarily the need to restructure and transform the Education Division (the nomenclature of the Centre before 2006) into two Directorates and their new roles, and secondly the need to strengthen the authority of the Directorates. Consequently the level of governance within the Education Directorates changed. The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) sanctions the substitution of one Director General (in place prior to 2006) by two Directorates, each headed by a Director General with a separate and different mission from the other. One Directorate establishes the quality and standards across the Maltese compulsory school age system, and the other Directorate serves to support and provide the services to the schools.

#### *1. Governance by the directorates*

In the Maltese Education system, the Directorates study and map the road map as to how colleges and schools have to work and oversee the shaping of policies and reforms, and what strategies need to be taken to implement them. However, the success of Maltese Education and its reforms depend considerably on the practitioners at the school site. Their participation is crucial and valuable and it needs to be acknowledged that success depends on how the Directorates liaise with the college and school leaders and their teachers. *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) sanctions and actually calls for the Directorates to work with the colleges and schools, not leaving them on their own or dictating what they need to do but actually working with them. The changes that the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) generates are intended to have important implications for the governing of local colleges and schools, particularly in the application of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) is meant to establish a model that shall give those at the school site more voice and a participative role in the talking process, rather than merely listening. It makes provisions for this collaborative model of governance in Part II of the Bill, entitled the '*Constitution and Functions of a Directorate for Educational Services*' (DES) (Laws of Malta, 2006). The mission of the DES, as stipulated in the Act, Part II, Article 10, p.631 (Laws of Malta, 2006) is to:

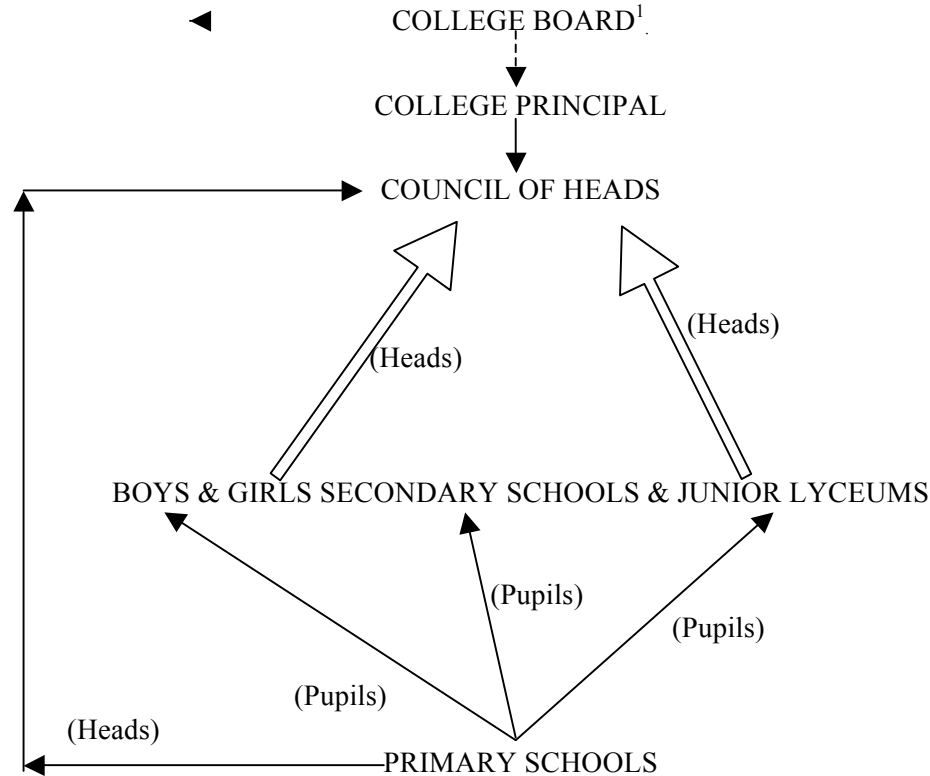
...ensure the effective and efficient operation of and delivery of services to the Colleges and State schools within an established framework of decentralization and autonomy.

According to Article 11(1): 631 of the same Act, (Laws of Malta, 2006) the DES also has to work '...in constant collaboration with the Colleges and schools..., and to encourage and facilitate their networking and cooperation.' Articles 10 and 11 imply that it is considered necessary for our Directorates to nurture in our Education system what Joseph (2002, p.59) refers to as the 'flow of bottom-up communication.' This means that the Directorates are meant to move away from the current conservative form of top-down bureaucratic model, which restrains the voices of the stakeholders at the schools.

### **6.4.2 The Hierarchical Structure of the Colleges**

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) provides also a legal framework for the administrative structure of the local State-maintained Colleges. Figure 6.1 demonstrates the common administrative structure model of each of the ten Maltese Colleges:

**Figure 6.1:** The Governance Model of Maltese Colleges



1. The College Board at the top of the hierarchical governance model of every College is not yet constituted

### *1. The College Principal and the Council of Heads*

I think that the post of the College Principal is an innovative step for Maltese Education. Prior to 2006, Principals were only synonymous with Maltese Independent schools. The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) makes provisions for the State College Principal who is to be the curricular leader of the college. S/he will be responsible for the educational journey of a child in the college entering Kindergarten and leaving at Form V. The roles and responsibilities of the College Principal are quite comprehensive. They are expected to create synergy and instilling a collaborative culture in the college members that is expected to bring together the community within the college. The Principal's role also entails creating a model in the way of thinking, the way of believing, the way of operating and the way of leading schools. The principal is accountable to the College Board and also a member of the Board. S/he will also, to a certain extent, be accountable to the Minister who legally is responsible for the education portfolio. However, there is a whole structure (the Permanent Committee for Education and the two Directorates) between the College Principal and the Minister. Consequently, the College Principals are accountable to both Director Generals.

The College Principals do not have the power and the right to employ the needed personnel but it is acknowledged that their views are considered before a decision is taken. The implication of this is that the Principal can only suggest whom s/he wants to employ as one of the teaching member of staff or leader of a school. The fact that engaging professionals to teach or lead lies within the powers of the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) Authorities says a lot about the adopted decentralisation model.

The Council of Heads, a new committee for Maltese schools and the Education hierarchy, is a living proof of the collaborative culture and collegiality that is expected to leave its impact on the issue of governance and governing of colleges and schools. Furthermore, the workings of the Council of Heads, is based on the idea that all actors of the community participate in the activity that is reflected in the artefacts or concepts that the actors use. Such activity echoes the Engeström (1999) activity system's model (fig. 3.2). Its function is to draw up policies for the College, see to the management of the college and establish the ethos, the rationale and the vision of the college. The administrators of the school (the Head and the SMT) oversee the administration of the school. The Head alone is responsible for the governance of the school, and s/he attends Council of Heads meetings, unless s/he sends a member of their SMT team instead.

The data shows that the concept of the College, which is an intra- and inter-school joint working model, has realised itself very strongly among the majority of Heads. It gains reasonable ground at the Heads' tier. However, one admits that initially it was a challenge because there were Heads who readily embraced their collective responsibility and joint working and demonstrated enthusiasm, and there were other Heads who were very resistant because they were very comfortable where they were. Considering the data, which shows that overall collaborative work was slowly being fostered among Heads and eventually infiltrate the grass roots, one recognises the important role of the Head in motivating teachers and creating opportunities for the school to develop (Chapman, 2005 and 2008) and to create communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

### 6.4.3 Concerns

#### *1. Lack of consultation*

In the local setting, consultation with stakeholders at the grassroots has always been almost non-existent because the Director General and now Director Generals simply sent 'Official Circulars' to the leaders of the schools, who are expected to implement the directives and policy decisions that they contain. Interviewees, primarily teachers, expect the Director Generals to visit the schools and talk **with** them and not **at** them, as is happening. When they go, they simply tell them what is happening, rather than asking them what they think. It may be a compelling reality that consultation is a missing link and the repercussions can slow the evolution of the learning institutions, the reform and the process of change. Stoll and Fink (2003, p.6) seem to advocate a case for the consultative process, which is captured well in:

Historically.....teachers have not been involved in the changes and find little personal meaning in them. The sooner teachers are seen as knowledge workers, professional educators and leaders, the sooner schools will improve.

The interviews of teachers and Heads of School also make me understand that many of them consider involvement in the formation of policies, even in the curricular reforms crucial, and if we ever reach that stage of participation, Maltese Education and our students stand to benefit. Heads and teachers believe that participation can give them a sense of proprietorship because being involved in the formation process; they will be implementing what they discuss, suggest and maybe even drawn up with others. We have to move from simply paying lip service to decentralization and partnership in governance to making it real and factual. I believe that if this model of partnership between the Directorates and the schools materialises, where we will have a semi-centralised model, we can foster a collegial culture between the Directorates and the Schools. If the Directorates understand that Heads and teachers are an important asset to the equation of the Maltese Education system, they will have realised that there is a potential in everyone and everyone can bring their potential to the forum

#### **6.4.4 The Cross-Case Analysis**

##### *1. The issue of power*

Another notch in the hierarchical pyramid, which the Directorates institutionalized ad hoc and rendered it non-statutory, was the Education Leadership Council (ELC). In the interviews, Policy makers, the College Principals and the Heads of School make references to this Council. The discourse of the interviewees presents opposing views. There are those (Policy makers and College Principals) supporting this council and the Heads of School criticising its existence because they feel their authority and participation in the policy making of their school under threat.

The current situation reeks with the notion of power struggles. Considering their fears I ask: Was there any need for the institution of the ELC composed of the two Director Generals, the Directors and College Principals? Were the Director Generals that set it up, safeguarding the interests of the Directorates, and so retaining the power that the Directorates had? Or can one bring oneself to agree with Ranson (2011, p.411) that ‘public education cannot be left to chance and contingency ....’ because ‘it is the responsibility of the community and civil society as a whole?’

The current situation that sees the ELC formulating policy and taking decisions does not seem to mitigate in any way the Minister’s objective, who wanted to introduce the culture of distribution of power. The established two Directorates with two Director Generals are intended to separate the employer (DES) from the regulator Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE). However, when considering that both Director Generals sit on the ELC and chair the ELC it is practically impossible to see how decision-making authority will shift from central authorities (represented by the ELC) to the schools. Although the remit of the two Directorates differentiates between them, because one is about employing people and the other is about tasks and quality, I ask, how real is the autonomy and impartiality between the two directorates? This state of affairs seems to create a paradox. While the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) recognizes the role of the Central Government as supreme, it also endorses the autonomy of the Colleges. I ask, conscious of the status quo and the on-going reforms, in particular the issue of decentralisation: When will the Directorates allow the Colleges/schools to start determining and influencing practices as stipulated in the Act? (Laws of Malta, 2006)

The issue of power is also addressed by teachers vis-à-vis their Heads of School. Teachers feel distanced because decisions are taken at the Council of Heads. It emerges that leaders of colleges and schools seem to be failing their respective members of staff in the consultative process. As a result of this new hierarchy, the relevant groups, particularly teachers, are feeling distanced from the decisions that are affecting them, which is impacting on their morale and their worth as professionals. Both Heads of School and teachers feel distanced from the decision-making process of their superiors. Both Heads and teachers feel that they are not key players in decision-making concerning their institution. You have a scenario of Heads versus Principals and teachers versus Heads of School.

##### *a. Lack of clarity around boundaries*

I think that another meta-concept is the significance of the shift in roles and responsibilities, participation and influence in a professional sense that comes from a new hierarchy, which is not just teacher, Head of School but it is teacher, Head and College Principal. This new hierarchy, as certain interviewees (Principals and Heads of School) claim, creates new boundaries. There are problems around the boundaries, between the college principal’s domain and the Head’s domain. On examining and analysing the collected data I grow conscious that many a Head of School feel that the demarcation line between responsibilities and roles are rather vague and not well defined. Considering the narratives and arguments of the Heads of School, I realise that Heads feel that the

College Principal threatens their authority because at times you get him/her reaching into the school. For instance certain Principals allow the parents to phone him/her directly to deal with an issue that can be dealt with by the Head of School.

*b. Paper work overload*

The situation is further aggravated by the overloading of paper work, which is impinging on the Head's role; such as finding themselves unable to monitor teachers because the time is occupied by other demanding managerial work. The role of the Head seems to have become a bureaucratic administration role, particularly when one considers the fact that the government is the employer and not the Head of School. Heads also feel that things are handed down to them by the Principal *fete* accompli because decisions that now affect them are being taken at the College Principal level. So, you are left wondering what the role of the Head is within this new formulation; whether it is a leadership role or that of an office administrator coupled with that of ensuring compliance. Can this be considered as an implication that the new form of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools is having on educational governance and governing in the Maltese Islands?

*2. The College Board*

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) also makes clear provisions around the governance and governing of the colleges and their schools, such as the setting up of a consultative College Board, (fig. 6.1) for every College, which will not have executive powers. Policy makers argue that some of the members of the College Board will be from the wider community of the College, who can be an asset to the collaborative culture that is central to the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). Policy makers state that the College Board will be:

- linking the wider community with the school;
- bringing the world outside the College into the College;
- protecting the interests of the College since it will be involved in formulating the strategic vision and direction of the college;
- creating a circle of critical friends since the members will have personal interests, having their own children attending one of the schools of the college.

Researchers, such as Barton *et al.* (2006), acknowledge this perception of value behind the College Boards.

Regrettably, at the time of writing this thesis, the college governing boards are still not in place, subsequently making the colleges still subject to hierarchical governance from the Directorates. I think that Maltese Education, not having the College Boards, is missing out particularly when considering that the interviewed policy makers (in the first phase interviews) acknowledge the efficacy of having such College Boards. Can this be the result of the fact that the policy makers, in the Phase Two interviews, think that the College Board is not a priority?

I think that while what is being put in place is quite rigid and robust management model, an opportunity has been missed to bring in a wider range of players into the governing of the school. The irony of that is: here is something that was designed to enhance collaboration and improve quality between the school and the wider community, (the College Board and a balanced representation on the School Council) but actually in many ways the heavy hand of managerialism (Bush, 2011) is squeezing out collaboration.



I believe that it is also missing a whole range of benefits that can come from a wider distribution of governance in the system in Malta and those will be enhancing democratic participation in important institutions. It will be around actually strengthening the periphery and the autonomy of school by having better governance and having more governing at the individual school level rather than the whole college level. And what is being also missed thereby is actually some sense of capacity building, the capacity to understand, make appropriate decisions, and think strategically about the education system in Malta. So there is a lack of collectivity around it, which again is being squeezed out by quite a rigid management structure. This I think is the key point there.

## **6.5 Subsidiary Theme – Accountability Relationships**

### **6.5.1 Introduction**

Education, like any other enterprise, requires standards and benchmarks for performance. Consequently, and as established by the study findings, accountability emerges as considerably significant; a stance also opined by researchers (e.g. Cowie, and Cisneros-Cohernour, 2011 and Bezzina, 2009). Such point is relatively corroborated by the data of the study. When we are answerable to others, we are held responsible for our actions, which can make us morally bound to our behaviour and activities and accordingly try to raise our act. The fact that people are held accountable does make us more and more responsible for what we do.

#### *1. The Legal Framework of Accountability in Maltese State-maintained Colleges*

The amendment to the Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) empowers the DQSE to authorise officers from its Educational Inspectorate to inspect both state and non-state schools.

Such officers, as may be duly authorised in writing by the Director General of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education shall have the power to enter in any College, school, class or place of instruction, and inspect and report on the teaching process, the physical environment, and the observance of the conditions, standards, policies and regulations established and made by virtue of this Act.

*(The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006 Cap.327, Article 19(1), p.637)*

The issue of accountability also devolves onto the Colleges increasing responsibilities and with it greater accountability. One of the functions of each College is to: ‘(e)nsure the responsibility and the accountability of whosoever is involved in the schools in the educational process of the student.’ (Laws of Malta, 2006, p.657)

### **6.5.2 Understanding Accountability**

James *et al.* (2008, p.30) present accountability as an ethical concept, when they claim that accountability ‘...usually carries with it a sense of being responsible for something and answerable to another for the discharging of that responsibility’.

Almost all interviewees’ discourse demonstrates somewhat similar arguments to that of James *et al.* (2008). Many think that they all have to feel responsible for each other. In addition, having analysed the content of the responses, I come to understand that all educators feel that they need to work together. It is not a case of them and us. It is everyone (directorates, colleges and schools) being

responsible for one main programme and that is, helping every child to succeed. Emergent from the study as an indicator of this state of affairs, schools and their practitioners are expected to be responsible and accountable for their performance, predominantly to the DQSE; especially since our education system follows a centralised or, as some want to claim, a semi-centralised model. In such circumstances, Maltese schools, like schools in many other countries, are expected to meet the targets set by their particular government, an opinion underlined by Leithwood and Earl (2009) who hold that schools follow the paths set out by society and its government.

I think that the Directorates, the guardians of Maltese Education for the local Government, together with society expect school educators to be accountable for their performance. Literature (Earley and Creese in Lumby and Foskett, 1999; Leithwood and Earl, 2000) in essence argues that schools are accountable to society for the kind of education that they provide due to the social and political context in which they operate. They are also accountable because society has entrusted them with the responsibility of providing all children with meaningful and worthwhile experiences that are meant to help them grow into independent and active citizens.

Interviewees also claim that accountability is pegged to the decentralisation process. They contend, in line with what researchers (Lieberman, 1999 and Caldwell, 2005) discuss in their studies; that because of the decentralisation process that the education sector is supposed to be undergoing, as has happened in other countries, the accountability concept starts being an issue of concern and debate.

### ***6.5.3 Collective Accountability***

The findings also offer other perspectives, particularly about the implications for intra- and inter-school accountability relationships when considering the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. The analysis of the study findings establishes that when practitioners work as a team, they can introduce practices that can help them achieve that goal (the underlying meta-concept of the communities of practice; Wenger, 1998) and as a result they are held accountable for it; whether through their performance agreements or through their day to day practices in the classrooms. Ultimately, I think that an educator who looks at his/her work and evaluates his/her practices on a daily basis is actually stating that one is accountable for what one does or does not do.

As established by the data, interviewed practitioners believe that working collaboratively implies coming together because together they believe in the common good; that they need to help every child to achieve. The implication of this collaborative joint working endeavour means that regardless of the class that someone taught, everyone is held responsible for what is done, (Leithwood and Earl, 2009). Ultimately all educators need to be cognisant of the fact that since they are now all working collaboratively for a common goal, they are all accountable for what our students manage to do. The implication means that educators become responsible for the performances of the learners as the learners themselves, (Valli and Buese, 2007).

My understanding from the data is that most interviewees realize that the colleges provide a new framework in which to work and that this framework demands a different culture and a different frame of mind. They recognise that the College reform introduces what many refer to as collective accountability because now they are being told to work collaboratively and to address things from a collaborative perspective as against the isolationist model they were used too.

#### ***6.5.4 Challenges and Concerns***

My understanding is that changing a mind-set provokes challenges, especially when in Malta we do not have a culture where people sit down and are actually honest about their practice. The time and place where people of different ages observe each other and learn to be critical and not feel hurt about it can be a great achievement. This is a major challenge. I feel that this is the culture that needs to permeate through our systems, and when it does we will be forming communities of practice as presented by Wenger-Trayner (2006). I also think that the DQSE can create the structure and the context of discourse so that people realize that this is the practice, which is essential for improvements to take place and be sustained over time.

Consequently, I think that one of the bigger challenges is getting a person to accept the fact that s/he needs help in specific areas. I think that the lack of disposition towards critical evaluation of practice is the inherent culture of years of teaching alone. Having such a history is not easy to change the mind-set founded on a culture underlined by years of solitary teaching in a classroom that lent itself to the feeling of the classroom or the school as ‘my kingdom’. Such an aspect can very well be tackled at the school level where the leader’s skills can be tried and tested. Leaders of colleges and schools can work together on programmes that will help their stakeholders understand that an inclusive learning community where people grow by helping each other will go a long way in sustaining the paradigm shift that the myriad of reforms are bringing on. Within such a context and with accountability becoming part of our lives it is essential that the inspectorate system will be sensitive to the existing realities and acknowledge the fact that schools face a range of problems and also that they may be strong on some dimensions and in need of improvement in others. This can be the ideal starting point for a collaborative relationship between school practitioners and officials within the Quality Assurance Department (QAD). This will help nurture the trust needed for people to understand the importance about internal and external reviews.

##### ***1. The issue of standard accountability parameters***

The analysis of the data establishes the concept that standard accountability is pegged to the decentralization process that the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) underlines. Consequently, I contend that as a result, accountability mechanisms and structures will need to be put into place to maintain standards, and as Dempster and Logan, (1998) claim, it will then be crucial to have an intelligent understanding of accountability. Emerging from the research I understand that we need to establish common grounds for accountability criteria. Many interviewed educators maintain that standards should be set, if they are expected to be responsible for a common belief.

However, as is pointed out by those interviewees who teach low-achievers, setting standard descriptors for accountability matters is not practical, especially when taking into account the complexities of the mixed ability model class adopted as the new way forward for Maltese Education. Such apprehensiveness is justifiable, particularly when these teachers acknowledge that they are struggling to balance between the difficulties of teaching low achieving students and high achievers amid little external support. It emerges that proper support, which can help both Heads and teachers address the several challenges that they are experiencing because of the reform process, is found to be lacking.

#### ***6.5.5 The Cross-Case Analysis***

The discussion I present in this section addresses the new sub-themes that emerge in the study from the cross-case analysis of the two phases of the study. The sub-themes I present here are the ones that do not have a commonality with those of Phase One.

### *1. Allying Commitment to Accountability*

Emergent from the study, particularly from policy makers, was the notion that anything can work as long as people are committed. If individuals believe in something they can make it work. However, knowing that people do not work in a vacuum, more so if you are working in a context which is heavily trade unionised, stakeholders have to challenge those parameters that inhibit innovation and need to make the unions aware that things cannot work in the same way as they used to. Climates can change so long as there is a concerted effort by individuals regardless of what is happening around them. I think that there are examples (from interviews) not only in the Maltese Islands but also globally (Connolly and James, 2006; Fullan, 2007 and Sergiovanni, 2005), which show that if people want to make a difference they do make a difference in spite of the pressures. Considering the findings, I think that every educator can make a difference because they are projecting an image. Furthermore, educators will make a difference when they understand that being held responsible is not a punishment but is actually part of their growth process.

### *2. External and Internal Audits*

Given its link to school development, accountability is also considered by many interviewees as an attribute of governance, a means to monitor developments both from an internal and external perspective, as observed also by Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) and Austen *et al.* (2012). Furthermore, emergent from the study as an indicator of the interviewees' perception of external and internal audits, together with the analysis of official documents, I think that evaluation or audits are deemed central to school improvement. This entails teachers and leaders of schools to take account of what is happening in the classrooms and deal with all aspects of school life. Whenever education systems and provision are examined with a view to improvement, external and internal or self-evaluation is taking place. In the past you had people evaluating their work and others not doing it. The study makes evident that policy makers believe that evaluation will foster a strong culture of reflection that should lead to school improvement, an opinion held by James, (2007). Appreciating the benefits of evaluation and reflection, both forms of audit became mandatory.

However, the findings also call for a more cautious approach and that the manner and structure of audits, whether internal or external, need to be refined so that the ultimate objective will be constructive; one that gives support and professional guidance and not solely to identify weaknesses. If this is ignored there may be the possibility of having schools 'conditioning' audit outcomes and present an unrealistic representation of their state of affairs. Consequently, we need to tread carefully particularly knowing that schools are composed of humans, and therefore different dynamics can be at play, especially when considering studies (Cowie and Cisneros-Cohernour, 2011 citing Nichols and Berliner, 2007 and Webb, 2006) which indicate that school leaders have engineered tests' outcomes so as to create a relationship between school improvement and accountability.

Maltese Education can make headway if educators evaluate their practice and acquiesce to the notion that someone may have to audit those very practices so as to acknowledge developments and to identify areas that need to be addressed so as to ensure improvement. The question that poses itself then is: If there are matters that require to be enhanced, what will the school, the college or the directorates provide in order to help? I think that if a person or the leader of a school accepts the fact that help is needed in specific areas, it should be tackled at the school level. Furthermore, the QAD whilst fulfilling its legal functions can also provide both a supportive and inspectorate role. Consequently, the issue will go back to the professional 'communities of practice' (Wenger-Trayner, 1998) where people grow by helping each other grow internally. When this is achieved we may be moving towards a better understanding of collective accountability where all the members of the school understand that they are all accountable since they are working as a team.

## 6.6 Concluding Comment

The title of *FACTS* (MEYE, 2005), which contains proposals for the transformation process that the various sectors of Maltese Education were to go through, is also used as the slogan the government chose in 2005 to serve as a beacon for the reforms that will follow. The fundamental principle is that all children attending State-maintained schools will experience a meaningful educational journey that will help them develop the necessary skills necessary to meet the tomorrow's challenges.

In this chapter I discussed the voiced opinion, the concerns and challenges relevant to the primary theme of inter-school collaboration and networking and the implications for the secondary themes of educational leadership and management, governance and governing and accountability in the context of collaborative endeavour that was central to the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). I have tried to present an objective analysis and discussion of the findings, presenting the opinions of the various stakeholders that were directly involved in this study. The analysis also helped me to understand the area under review but also to grapple with the pragmatic concerns of educators that are handling reform at the grassroots level.

The conclusions and recommendations will be presented in Chapter 7, which follows.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.0 Introduction

In this study I discuss the educational reforms in Maltese Education, particularly analysing the nature of intra- and inter-school working in State-maintained Colleges in the Maltese Islands. The aim behind the study is to explore one main research question:

*What is the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools?*

and three subsidiary ones:

In the context of such collaboration:

1. *What are the implications for the leadership and management of the institutions involved?*
2. *What are the implications for the governance and governing of the institutions involved?*
3. *What are the implications for accountability relationships within and between the institution involved?*

As a result, four main themes (networking and collaboration; educational leadership and management; educational governance and governing and accountability relationships) central to the research questions are explored. The conclusions and recommendations I present in this chapter are formulated on

- documented material *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) and *For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta*. (MEYE, 2005);
- observation sessions of the College Council of Heads meetings;
- the emergent sets of data reported in the findings (Chapter 5);
- the discussion of these findings presented in Chapter 6.

In this chapter I begin with an introduction, in which I present the four research questions and the four key themes central to the research questions of the study (7.0). I present the conclusions in four sub-sections:

- Section 7.1 presents the conclusions that emerge around the primary research question central to collaboration;
- Section 7.2 embodies the conclusions that surface around the subsidiary research question of educational leadership and management;

- Section 7.3 shows the conclusions that emerge around the subsidiary research question of educational governance and governing;
- Section 7.4 shows the conclusions that are central to the subsidiary research question of educational accountability relationships;

The contribution of the study to the corpus of knowledge (Section 7.5) follows. Section (7.6) presents the recommendations, which highlight the implications that the findings have for future research (7.6.1), policy (Section 7.6.2) and practice (Section 7.6.3). The chapter closes with a concluding comment (Section 7.7)

## **7.1 What is the nature of Collaboration in a Policy Context that requires joint working by individual schools?**

### ***7.1.1 Introduction***

The analysis of the gathered data, which has the primary research question of collaboration central to its conceptual framework, brings out a number of interesting findings. Primarily, the newly endorsed collaborative way of working in the education sector requires a new approach to joint working within and between individual schools. Collective activity in the education sector resonates some of the major Theories particularly, the Actor Network and Activity Theories, Social Capital and Communities of Practice, which literature (Ferragina, 2012; Hardman, 2007; Wenger-Trayner, 1998 and Whittle and Spicer 2008) underpin collaboration and networking.

The new collaborative way of working, underlined by the new reforms endorsed by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006), together with the new policies that the reforms introduce, in principle, find the support of the majority of interviewees, who have also been very receptive and supportive to the study. Consequently, interviewees are attuned to many of the reforms being proposed, because they regard the on-going new policies and changes relatively beneficial. However, they also acknowledge that the implementation process of policies and changes, an offshoot of the reform, is not to be without issues, concerns and challenges, particularly since the situation is leading to an increase in work overload and tension. The conclusions around the primary theme of networking and collaboration follow:

### ***7.1.2 Conclusions that Emerged around this Primary Theme***

The research presents conclusions that around the primary research question of the study that are central to the key theme of collaboration and networking. To begin with, it becomes apparent from the data that the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) has formalized and legalized the informal collaborative synergy in schools and between schools that had existed in some instances but not in all. Such informal synergy is considered to be somewhat effective in helping to foster a collaborative practice and facilitating the eventuality of the paradigm shift in the attitude of educators towards intra-and inter-school joint-working. However, the findings indicate that such way of working is no longer appropriate and will not sustain the collaborative way of working sanctioned in the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006).

It becomes evident that having intra- and inter-school collaboration is crucial for the sustainability of the reforms, because it fosters dialogue, collegiality, sharing of good practice and learning from one another. This new form of collaboration underlines the concept of togetherness, which materialises into combined energy. The study, corroborated by literature, for instance (Chapman, 2008 and West,

2010) establishes that networking is all about efforts of joint working, collaborative attempts to learn what is happening, to identify issues, improve existing practice and stimulate a culture of sharing good practices to reinforce the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, in educational settings, networks are described as ‘purposeful social entities characterised by a commitment to quality, rigor, and a focus on standards and student learning’ (Hopkins, 2005; cited in FACTS, 2005, p.37). Consequently, the current paradigm of networking has been recognised as the most significant organisational system that will leave the desired results for the transformed Maltese Education System. It is assumed that new collaborative way of working can become engrained in our educators, to the point that they can feel comfortable and committed to this new model of intra- and inter-school joint-working.

The new culture of networking, collaboration and collegiality, which can be referred to as joint-working within and between learning communities emerges as making headway, particularly among Heads of School in the College Council of Heads’ meetings chaired by their College Principal. Such, new model of joint-working among school leaders demonstrates that collaboration as presented in the primary research question is beneficial and central to the professional development of educators and the educational institutions that they work in.

However, the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools is not without tension and challenges. Changing the mind-set of hundreds of educators, since there can be people who will argue in favour of the sanctioned model of collaboration and others who will militate against it. One significant challenge that emerges is transforming the isolationist traditional model and tackling the issues of identity, uniqueness and the diversity dimension. It is acknowledged that achieving success in this new form of intra- and inter-school joint working as indicated in the provisions of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) requires effort, hard work and perseverance.

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) makes provisions for learning opportunity spaces; weekly ninety minutes curricular development meetings. Heads and teachers point to inferences of reservations about the realisation of these meetings. Heads of Primary schools note that releasing their teachers for these meetings is not always possible because they rely on the availability of peripatetic teachers who substitute the class teachers. The nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools requires the space that will allow collaboration to manifest itself into real practice. Such collaborative meetings need to be regular and not sporadic.

## **7.2 In the context of such Collaboration, what are the implications for Educational Leadership and Management of the institutions involved?**

### ***7.2.1 Introduction***

The analysis of the gathered data around the subsidiary research question of educational leadership and management of the institutions involved brings out a number of interesting conclusions. Primarily, the newly endorsed collaborative way of working in the education sector has implications for educational leadership and management.

### ***7.2.2 Implications for Educational Leadership and Management***

One significant implication is that college and school leaders need to have the right skills to be able to foster and sustain the collaborative and collegial practices that the new reforms and policies are



underlining. College and school leaders need to build a sense of trust with their staff so they will be able to forge and lead others. Leadership audacity and being visionary are also important skills that college and school leaders need to have and which are recognised important in sustaining intra-and inter-school collaboration.

Another implication that emerges is that collegial leadership needs to be grounded in respect, sharing, understanding, cooperation and empathy, and that leaders of schools need to strive harder on building a team culture, sustaining collegiality, which can sustain productive collegiality. A Staff oriented style of leadership is considered beneficial because it can assist school leaders in facing the current and future reform related challenges, particularly in transforming the mind set of their staff and which can help the on-going reforms gain currency.

Having a system and structure that is less bureaucratic and less dependent on individuals and more on shared forms of leadership is considered crucial. School leaders, as emphasised by interviewed teachers will need to adopt a more shared leadership style and this can be manifested through more consultation and collaboration. It becomes evident that experiencing and living shared leadership in Maltese schools will be achieved when members of staff in schools are given roles and leaders of schools provide teachers with proper and effective support structures.

The nature of collaboration in a policy context also raises implications that materialise in challenges and concerns around educational leadership and management. Re-conciliating praxis with needs and turning rhetoric into reality is proving to be challenging, because it is negatively impacting the leadership work of leaders of colleges and schools. Such leaders feel overloaded with administrative work of infrastructure nature and mundane school needs. The findings highlight the dilemma as to whether the managerial role of the Heads of School is overpowering their leadership responsibility and can be producing burnout. Educational leaders find themselves unable to focus and develop their leadership roles that can help them mentor and support their staff with the eventuality of maintaining school development that can sustain the objectiveness of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006).

The true characteristic of decentralisation of leadership roles is at best artificial. The conclusion is that the new post of College Principal is considered another notch in the administrative hierarchy and this is met with disgruntled Heads. Heads feel that they have limited authority because they have to refer everything to the Principal for approval. There is a growing concern among the Heads that their superiors are living in an ivory tower and that the divide between theory and the current praxis of the shared and distributed educational leadership is far and wide. It seems that behind the rhetoric of decentralisation exists an agenda of a centralised and traditionally hierarchical approach to doing things. Such top-down management cannot allow the form of collaboration that requires intra- and inter-school collaboration to bear fruition.

Leadership and professional development programmes emerge as significant to the theme of educational leadership and management. Providing space for Heads of School and teachers to grow and develop is central for the sustainability of intra- and inter-school joint working. However one needs to be cautious because while on one hand leaders of colleges and schools have to act as catalysts of the growth and development of their members of staff, they also have to create the right working relationship with their subordinates so that their involvement will not inhibit spontaneous initiatives taken by their personnel. Professional development sessions for the teachers on a regular basis, ideally can take place in conjunction with other schools.

The conclusion around this sub-theme is that leaders are still quite autocratic in the way they managed change and the way they communicate with members of staff. Many Heads of School and even education officials appear insensitive when delegating or communicating directives, particularly when their attitude is outweighed by a tone of authority, lacking understanding and empathy. Leaders of School appear to be somewhat insensitive to the people that create the physical environment of schools. Unless such an issue is addressed, collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools will create implications for educational leadership and management.

### **7.3 In the context of such Collaboration, what are the implications for Educational Governance and Governing of the institutions involved?**

#### ***7.3.1 Introduction***

The analysis of the gathered data around the subsidiary research question of educational governance and governing of the institutions involved brings out a number of interesting conclusions. Primarily, the newly endorsed collaborative way of working in the education sector has implications for educational governance and governing.

#### ***7.3.2 Implications for Educational Governance and Governing***

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) makes provisions for a college principal, the Chief Executive Officer of the College accountable to the College Board. The principal, as the chairperson of the College Council of Heads, unifies the school community among the Heads, and is to create a paradigm shift in the way of thinking, the way of operating, the way of leading schools. However, the inception of the college principal initiated issues and concerns among the interviewed Heads of School. It appears that the limited autonomy and the leadership of the Heads are being compromised since the style of leadership that the college principal adopts can impinge on the influence and the leadership of the Heads.

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) also makes provisions for the creation of the College Council of Heads. One can find grounds for the success of these working councils. Establishing the Council of Heads has been one of the top priorities on the agenda of the 2006 reforms. Consequently, In fact, the Directorates support these Councils with the necessary mechanisms and structure, which are bearing fruition. I believe that the Councils of Heads are actually creating a forum for debate, which is genuine enough to lead the schools towards improvement.

Although admittedly the College Council of Heads is a success story, working collaboratively as sanctioned by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) in a policy context still creates implications around educational governance and governing of the institutions involved. Maltese schools are still experiencing the same 'top-down' model that existed pre-2006. The Principal is simply substituting and representing the Directorates. Consequently, Heads of School feel threatened by what is perceived as impositions by the College Principal. The parameters and responsibilities for both the Principals and the Heads of School appear not to have been clearly established. Consequently, the issue of power, control and identity surfaces as a critical point of concern because of the lack of clarity around boundaries.

The nature of collaboration in a policy context raises implications for educational governance and governing. Such implications are manifested in the concerns and challenges that emerge. If such concerns are addressed well, the objectives set in motion by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) can be

reached. One such concern emerges as a result of the setting-up of the non-statutory Education Leaders Council (ELC). Heads of School are concerned because the workings of this committee are an exemplar of the 'top-down' traditional practice. Since the Principal does not discuss with the Heads issues that concern the college and which can be taken to the ELC forums, Heads feel critical of the ELC because they feel left out of such important discussions.

The Heads of School meet together with the Principal once a month, suggesting that Heads have a voice in discussions and decision making at College level. These council meetings are places where school leaders meet to discuss common issues and concerns, and to reflect on their collective work. These meetings and discussions help build understanding and momentum to push collaboratively the work of the college to new levels, at times ignoring the individual school within the college. However, if the Heads do not participate in formulating the meeting's agenda, school concerns are not brought to the discussion table.

Lack of consultation also exists between the Head of School and the teachers. The current practice does not seem to reinforce the practice of collaboration, collegiality and shared governance, which can help to sustain the collaborative practice that is proposed for the Colleges. The conclusion is that the top-down approach is still in place even in the micro-politics of the school.

The issue of the change in dynamics between the Directorates and Colleges is central around the notion of power. The conclusion here is that Heads of School need to work on the skill of working with others, if they want to motivate the stakeholders to come, share and learn. Sustaining the skill of motivating others will take some time to bring about particularly knowing that some will never get there because they cannot work in a team. Consequently, an implication arises for educational governance and governing that needs attention.

The recruitment of personnel, which is a central issue around governance and governing, appear to be impacting the overall performance of schools. Schools appear not to have the power to recruit personnel. If Heads are to have the freedom to engage personnel, they will surely be able to address better the needs of their institution, and can sustain the collaborative practice as sanctioned by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) that requires intra- and inter-school joint working. The recruitment of personnel is the basis of contrasting views between policy makers and Heads of School. The Directorates believe in keeping the recruitment process the responsibility of the Directorate for Educational Services (DES). However, it appears that what seems like a centralised process is mitigated by the fact that although the College Principals do not have the power to employ Heads of School, they are consulted and their views are given the deserved attention before a decision is taken to employ or deploy a Head to a particular school.

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) decrees the inception of a consultative College Board at the top of the hierarchical structure of every college. Disappointingly, since 2006 these College Boards are not yet in place. I deem the missing board as a missed opportunity for the Maltese government to give more autonomy to the schools and create a more distributed form of governance at the school site. The college boards can be beneficial for the colleges and the schools since they can bring with them experience, knowledge and expertise of the outside world because of its mix. Such mix can enhance the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools.

## **7.4 In the context of such Collaboration, what are the implications for Accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved?**

### ***7.4.1 Introduction***

The analysis of the gathered data around the subsidiary research question of accountability relationships involved presents a number of interesting conclusions. Primarily, the newly endorsed collaborative way of working in the education sector has implications for accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved.

### ***7.4.2 Implications for Accountability Relationships***

When practitioners, whether Principals, Heads or teachers embrace the new model of collaboration proposed in FACTS (MEYE, 2005) and endorsed by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) they will be fostering what is known as collective accountability. Educators are being asked to work together in order to identify their strengths based on their expertise and experiences and eventually from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and collective accountability. The new approach of working collaboratively makes all the school practitioners equally responsible for the child. It is no longer a question of the classroom or subject teacher or just the Head of School that shoulders responsibility for the child's educational journey, but the whole school; ergo collective accountability.

The inception of the Colleges provides a new model in which to work and which demands new approaches. As a result of reforms and the introduction of new structures and set-ups (for instance mixed ability classes) new teaching approaches and methodologies have to be adopted, which many feel is the source of tension and challenges. The implication of all this is that the stakes of the accountability framework has been raised. Consequently, schools and their professional teams are now open to more pressure and demands from the government, parents and society.

Encouraging and sustaining a model of collective accountability may very well be challenging, particularly because of the inherent practice of teaching alone and that change and reforms do not exist in a vacuum but in a context, in which the human dynamics are complex and play a defining role, underlining the change process with tension. Teachers, in particular, have very often found it difficult to accept critical evaluation of their practice, ergo why the solitary teaching model is still sought by teachers. Consequently, efforts to create collaborative engagements are beset with difficulty. Adhering to the collective decision once taken proves to be a central challenge for the objective of sustaining the on-going reforms and ensuring that they are owned by all.

The reform demands the implementation of policies and changes, particularly a new accountability framework since prior to 2006, accountability lacked direction and structure to the point that individuals did not take responsibility for their action. The suggestion is that the accountability dimension was, to a certain extent, missing. Consequently commitment is allied to accountability, which means that all educators (whether they are college or school leaders or teachers) have to shoulder responsibility for their work and their involvement in the education of the child. Among the implications for accountability relationships is that all stakeholder need to understand that responsibilities, moral disposition and the role as educators to facilitate holistic education challenges requires commitment, particularly to the new collaborative endeavour, regarded by many as one of the fundamental pillars for the success of the reform.

The provisions of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) that introduced the intra- and inter-school joint-working model bring with them implications for accountability, primarily that all professional

educators need to undergo a paradigm shift in order to mature in the way they perceived accountability. Understanding the implications for accountability created by the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools shall help educators understand that being held responsible was actually part of their professional growth process.

The external auditing exercise conducted by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (which involves observing lessons, interviewing members of the school, members of the Students' Council; analysing the ethos and vision of the school; reviewing teachers' lesson plans and schemes of work etc.) is needed because it discourages any attempt by school practitioners to fabricate outcomes. Performance monitoring is important because any education system needs feedback about how its practitioners perform if they want to learn and improve their professional standards. Generally, the external auditing exercise creates homogeneity, ensures that all colleges follow the same standards and criteria and promotes the same culture of consistent excellence. However, considering that the objective of any accountability audit systems, which is to identify weaknesses and offer support to those schools or individuals who show weaknesses, and not simply to reprimand and leave it at that; the current external auditing exercise of schools needs to be reviewed.

## **7.5 Contribution to Knowledge**

All research is linked to the objective of unearthing new knowledge and what the contribution of research project will be to the relevant corpus of knowledge. I think that this study helps stakeholders and other researchers to understand the relationship of the existent knowledge to the study and the original contribution that the study will have to such knowledge.

The conclusions I present above help to identify the understanding of the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools. They also recognize the implications that such form of collaboration has for educational leadership and management, for educational governance and governing, and for accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved.

## **7.6 Recommendations**

Whenever reform, of any kind, is initiated, cynicism can permeate our discourse and since school leaders and teachers are the main gatekeepers for the actual success or failure of the reform, it is essential that their concerns are noted. The need for reforms in the local schooling process is long overdue. That the education system has been failing those that are most in need of it has been evident not just, as pointed out by local research, but also in the level of literacy, the dropouts and citizens with only a modicum of learning to their names. The eventual move has been towards a partial inclusivity that integrates learners of differing assessed abilities into the same cohort, creating an inclusive community of learning that will, on paper, benefit those who will otherwise have been sidelined while still taking care of the ones who show they can achieve more. I believe that this is simply not enough. I think that if the inspirational vision of *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) is to translate into a reality, there are implications for future research, policy and practice that need to be addressed.

The following section highlights the implications that have surfaced as a result of the study. Whilst respecting the themes studied, the implications will be presented under three main sections, namely: future research (7.6.1), policy (7.6.2) and practice (7.6.3).

### **7.6.1 Future Research**

Research is useful and exciting to conduct because it enables learning since the outcome is to obtain and add to the existent corpus of knowledge. As in any reform process, it is natural that controversies and debates arise, and resistance by certain individuals or groups develops. Consequently, future research becomes a crucial contribution in addressing the status quo so that the transformation of the Maltese Educational system into a new framework will be maintained and move from strength to strength.

The outcomes of this study highlight the need for future research that will help us to understand the climate within the colleges. Research can be undertaken in the need to nurture trust among the school practitioners, learning opportunities, having effective school leaders and the college micro-politics. The knowledge that emerges from these research projects will provide policy makers, college and school practitioners with significant data that will continue to sustain and develop the kind of collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools.

### **7.6.2 Policy**

The findings underline the implications that they have for policy and the relevant stakeholders. Implementing the recommended policies can help to sustain the nature of collaboration in a policy context that requires intra- and inter-school joint working so that all children will succeed.

#### *1. Professional development/Collaborative training*

The findings showed that there were a number of concerns around collaboration and collegiality. The Directorates in collaboration with the University of Malta should embark upon a training programme that can equip school practitioners with the necessary knowledge and skills that will help them understand the significance of collaboration and working collegially. Directorates need to establish a policy of professional development that all stakeholders will need to follow. Such training can help educators, particularly Heads and teachers to move away from the isolationist tradition that considers only the vision of 'my school' and 'my classroom'.

Directorates need to develop a training policy highlighting the significance of collaboration and collegial practice, which can help Heads of School and teachers understand fully the meaning of team teaching so that teachers will acquire the needed confidence that will help them share their teaching material and even instruction. Such training programmes can foster a more intra- and inter-school openness and trust between teachers and Heads of School.

#### *2. Learning opportunities*

Planning and sanctioning reforms to improve one's education system is to be lauded. However, one needs to have in place the appropriate logistics and mechanisms to maintain the implementation of the reforms and changes. Consequently, the Directorates need to work on policies that will provide the required personnel so that teachers can be released from their classroom duties to attend the weekly ninety minutes curricular development; an offshoot of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). I also argue that if we are to respect the spirit of the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006), then we need to give more leeway to the Colleges/schools to make their own particular arrangements. Such a possibility will see College/school personnel, through the Council of Heads, creating their own professional learning opportunities

### *3. A more decentralised system*

The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) mandates the need for a more decentralised system. Maltese Colleges and schools need to have control over the essential elements of a strategic plan of action. They need to control at least parts of their budgets, which can in turn influence staffing formula and teaching methods. The responsibility of employing college and school personnel needs to be passed on to the Colleges (Principal and respective Heads). Such policy will give the leaders of colleges and schools the empowerment to strengthen the collaboration that was sanctioned by the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006).

### *4. A more democratic dimension at the school site*

The remit of the DQSE is to set standards and then audit performance. The Directorate needs to move away from dictating what schools have to do, or micromanage school leaders. As things stand, the DQSE seems to have a conflict of interest when it attempts to audit or hold school leaders accountable because in effect the Directorate will be auditing its own decisions. Leaders of schools need to be given more latitude in the running of their schools, to the point that instructional decisions will be in the hands of the schools. Within such a context the School Development Plan becomes the main document that spearheads action at the school level. It is on this that the schools will be held accountable.

### *5. Setting up the College Board*

Policy makers in collaboration with the Directorates need to work together to implement the policy around the needed structure and mechanisms that will help in the realization and implementation of the College Board. This will bring in a wider range of players into the governance of the college and the schools. The current model, still receptive to top-down management, suggests that the opportunity that can create a form of wider distribution of governance system in Maltese Colleges and which will be enhancing democratic participation in our educational institutions may have been missed. When the Board, having a balanced mix of individuals representing the school community, is in place the schools within the colleges stand to gain because they will be bringing the world outside into the College and its schools will maintain a link between the schools and the wider community. This is an area that the Education Authorities and colleges need to start taking seriously if we want to have a greater representation of our communities in the way schools evolve.

## **7.6.3 Practice**

The study identifies also implication that the findings have for practice. Establishing compatibility between theory and praxis is essential, if Maltese Education is to move from strength to strength. The following are the emerging implications for practice.

### *1. A balanced approach to managing change*

The Directorates need to create a collaborative and collegial culture which nurtures the spirit of challenge innovation and risk taking. Roundtable dialogues and consultations with stakeholders need to be on-going to help generate a balanced system that allows for specific centralised practices while allowing enough latitude for networks and schools to make a difference. Establishing what is relevant is a key issue while allowing for such flexibility that is necessary for schools to make desired improvement as demands and needs change over time. Consequently, the Directorates need to rethink about the process of reform implementation, allowing for enough time for developments to be implemented, monitored and reviewed, thus avoiding implementing too many reforms and new policies without respite.

### *1. Communications with the wider community*

Schools need strive to build and maintain a strong communicating system with the wider community. State-maintained schools need to find avenues of communication, and educators need on-going training to refine their communication skills with outside environment. Learning and unlearning will help to bridge the gap that has separated the schools from the outside environment. Maltese practitioners need to fall in line with their global counterparts who are living the educational reality of building partnerships with the external communities. I suggest that colleges and schools should think out strategies to improve and maximize school-community cooperation, such as organizing community-teacher conferences, especially appreciating the fact that achieving success will be fraught with tension. There need to be more school-based community activity to bridge the gap that exists.

### *2. On-going teacher professional development*

Relevant training programmes for teachers need to be shaped particularly when the majority of teacher interviewees acknowledged that having to cope with mixed ability classes, after so many years of teaching streamed classes, is creating tension and is taking its toll on their performance. The Directorates have the moral and civic duty to make the necessary provisions and put in place the structures and mechanisms that will help teachers grow from within to handle the challenges they have to address.

### *3. The College Council of Heads*

The Council of Heads is an innovative structure for Maltese Education born as a result of the collaborative nature the College reform embodies. The structures of these councils and their collaborative work create a new sense of sharing and collegiality, which helps the Heads to mature, grow intellectually and professionally. However, we cannot sit on our laureates. We need to adopt the practice of internal auditing of these College Councils of Heads so that the stakeholders can enhance the workings of the councils and can give us a better idea of what is going on, how it is happening and where we may need to intervene. Since the College Council of Heads is also a forum for sharing good practices, it will be ideal for the Councils to report regularly on a national level their developments.

## **7.7 Concluding Comment**

This research can serve as platform for discussion and a tool for debate. What is important to discuss is how one should move towards a balanced system that allows for particular centralised practices while allowing the ‘appropriate’ latitude for networks and schools to make a difference. Establishing what is appropriate is a key issue while allowing for colleges and schools to make the desired improvement as we take education through the rest of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The list of recommendations can help the Directorates achieve this goal.



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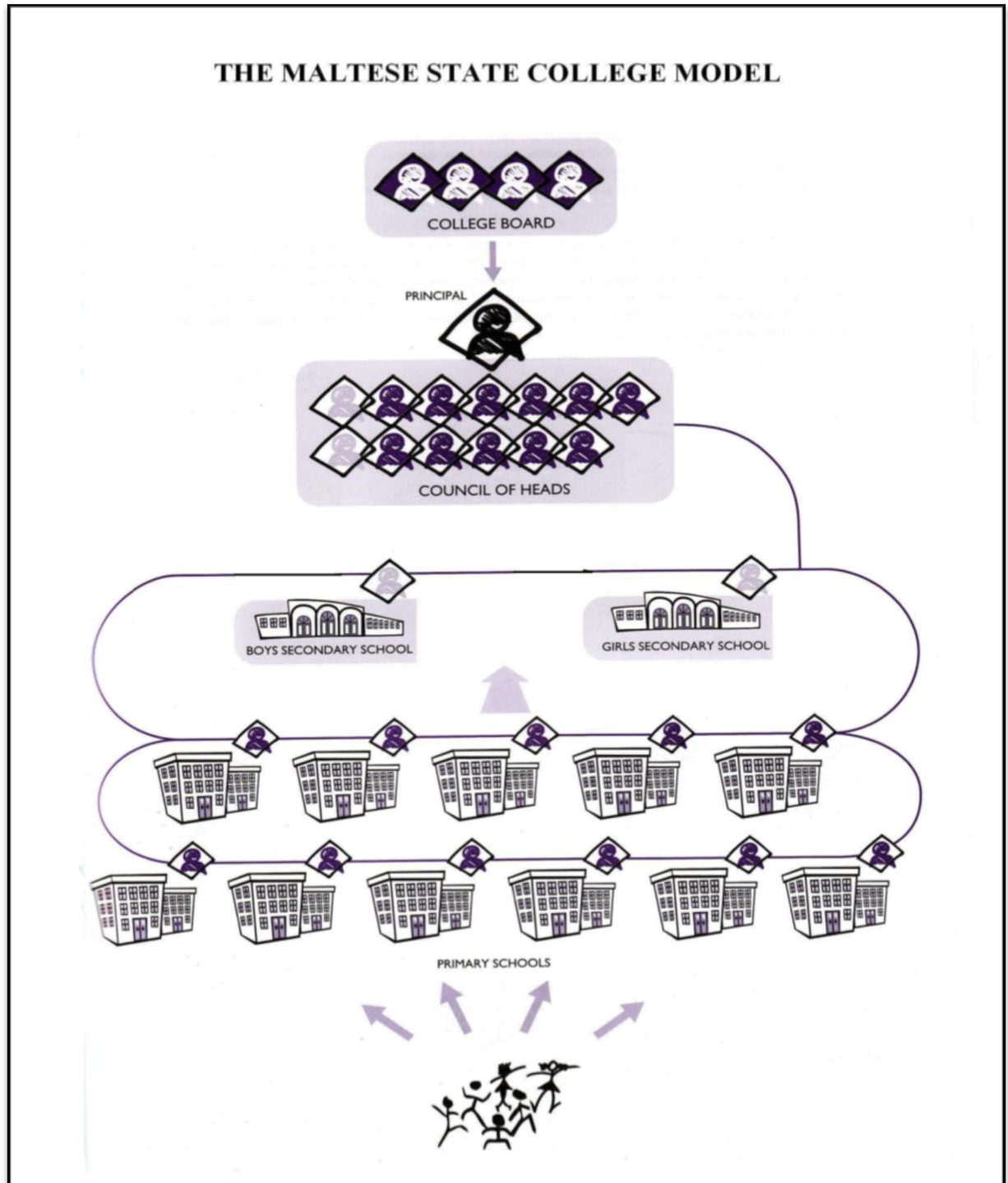
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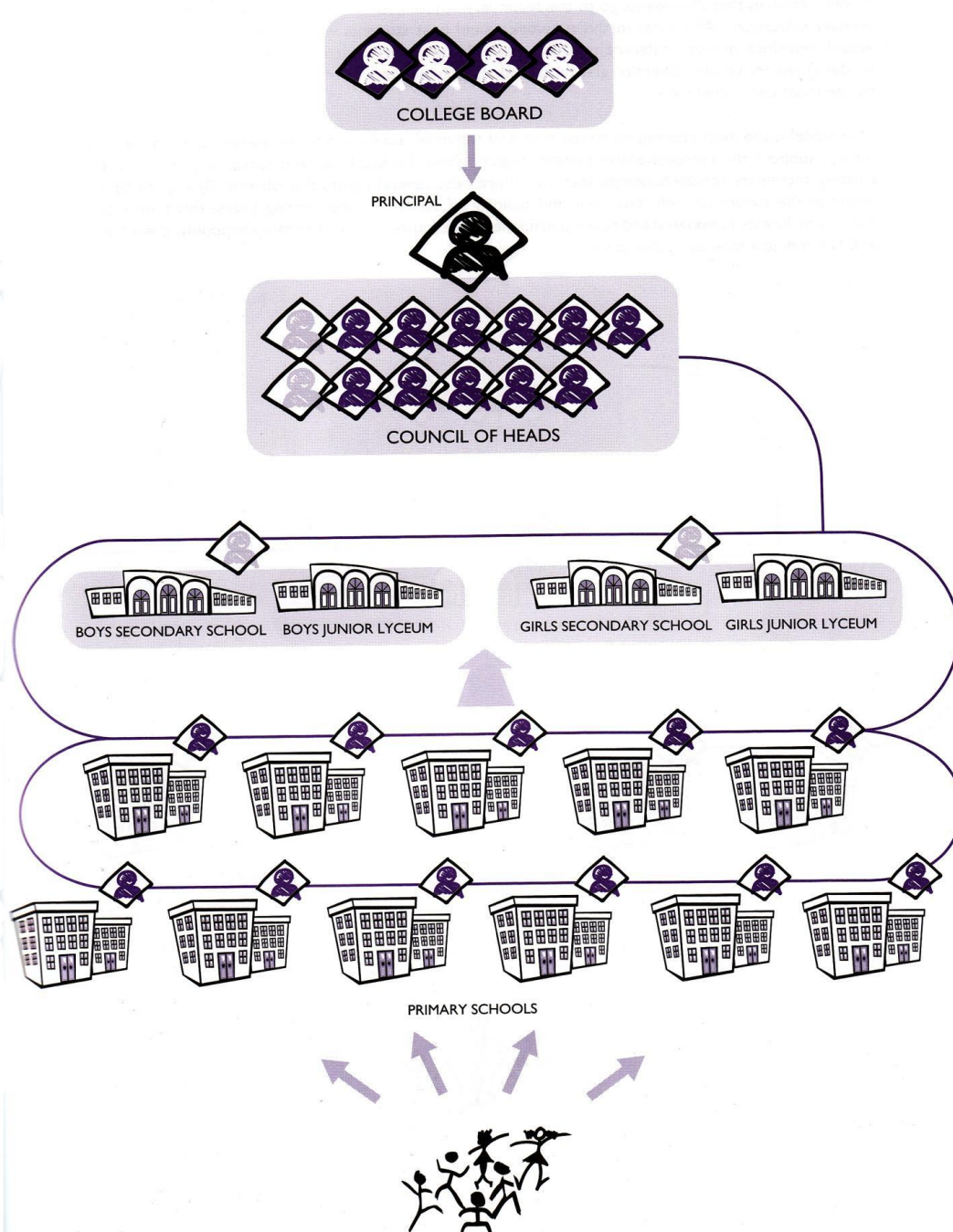
## Appendices

### Appendix 1: The Envisaged Maltese State-maintained College Model



## Appendix 2: The Current Maltese State-maintained College Model

### THE MALTESE STATE-MAINTAINED COLLEGE MODEL



### Appendix 3: The Interview Schedule

The wide-ranging questions asked during the interviews, which addressed the four key themes of the research questions, could fall within the areas of Context, Input and Process.

**Context** questions were focused on the rationale of the innovative reform of inter-school networking in State-maintained Colleges and other related policies. This gave rise to questions of attitudes of all interviewees towards this new approach in the local education system. It also gave rise to questions of opinion addressing this new culture of collaboration, which meant a paradigm shift in the way the respondents viewed working collaboratively, shared leadership and shared vision, collective autonomy, collective accountability, and governance. It also prompted questions of attitude and opinion in perceiving that a culture of collaboration needed to be nurtured and maintained for Maltese educational policies to bear fruition.

**Input** questions concerned the workings of the reform endorsed by the current Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006). The questions directed to this area had to be worded in such a way that they established the opinion of the respondents as to how far the existing application of the College Reform implemented the aims and objectives proposed by the official document *For All Children to Succeed* (MEYE, 2005) and sanctioned by the *Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006).

**Process** questions included investigation of the effects that such reforms (particularly those addressing the four key themes presented in the research questions) had on the stakeholders, Colleges, schools and classroom context. Consequently, there emerged the challenges and apprehensions of stakeholders and the time factor in which the reforms were taking place. The cohort members were asked their opinion about the appropriateness of the various aspects of the College Reform.

Sections A to D encompassed the wide-ranging interview questions that were asked to the diverse groups of interviewees and which addressed the key themes of the study within the areas of context, input and process.

**Section A:** Wide-ranging interview questions that addressed the primary theme of Networking and Collaboration:

#### 1. Context Questions

- What is your understanding of the concept of collaboration?
- What is your understanding of intra- and inter-school networking, collaboration and collegiality within a policy context?
- What is the nature of intra- and inter-school joint-working in the Maltese Islands?
- What values and beliefs are necessary to sustain collaboration and collegiality in State-maintained Maltese schools?

## **2. Input Questions**

- Since 2006, to what extent have collegiality and collaboration become part of the college or school culture that you work in?
- In your opinion what are the forms of intra- and inter-school collaboration that are being introduced in our education system?

## **3. Process Questions**

- How are collaborative practice and collegiality impacting the professional teaching practices?
- How are the current physical and human facilities for the colleges and schools or the lack of them, impacting on the workings of the College Reform policies?
- How is the networking rationale affecting the uniqueness and identity of the school as a community?
- What are the current issues/challenges in intra- and inter school collaboration?

**Section B:** Wide-ranging interview questions levelled at the subsidiary theme of Educational Leadership and Management:

## **1. Context Questions**

- How do you define the theme of educational leadership and management?
- Considering the reform model of collaboration, what do you say are the implications for the leadership and management of the colleges and schools?
- What form of leadership skills and qualities do you believe are essential to take the networked schools forward?
- How are school leaders serving as agents of change within the current reform?
- What form of leadership interaction is in place in the schools?
- How are leadership roles shared and delegated in the schools?

## **2. Input Questions**

- The reform documents speak of increased responsibilities at the school/College level. How is this impacting the leadership of the school?
- How is the current statutory managerial and administrative work impacting on the leadership dimension of your work?

### 3. Process Questions

- The *Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006) makes provision for the engagement of a number of personnel such as college psychologist, precincts officer, youth worker and others. A number of these seem to be still missing. How is this affecting the leadership of the college/school?
- How do you as a leader of a college/school strike a balance between the pressures coming from outside the school with the various needs arising from within?
- What are or will be the issues/challenges in school leadership and management for the leaders in Colleges and schools?
- Considering the nature of collaboration and collegiality as sanctioned by the current Act, (Laws of Malta, 2006) how are they impacting the leadership and management roles?

**Section C:** Wide-ranging interview questions that addressed the subsidiary theme of Educational Governance and Governing:

#### 1. Context Questions

- What is your understanding of the theme of educational governance and governing?
- Kindly describe the current forms of governance at the Directorates, the Colleges and the schools.
- What is your opinion about the new post of the College Principal?
- What is your view about the role of the Council of Heads?

#### 2. Input Questions

- What changes, in your opinion, were brought on by the current Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) to school governance?
- How is this state of affairs affecting you?
- The current Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) speaks of a consultative College Board, which is still not in place. What is your opinion about this?
- The current Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) contends that the Principal is to draw up the College Council of Heads' (CCoH) agenda and to include proposals by the Heads of School when he/she deems it to be opportune. How is this impacting you?

#### 3. Process Questions

- How are the new structures of governance and governing, at both the central and school level, impacting the college and school stakeholders?

- How is the ad hoc Education Leaders Council (ELC) impacting the school?
- How is the teachers' voice being represented in the newly established Council of Heads' forum?
- Considering the nature of collaboration and collegiality, as sanctioned by the current Education Act, (Laws of Malta, 2006) what are the implications for the governance and governing of the institutions involved?
- What are the current issues/challenges in school governance?

**Section D:** Wide-ranging interview questions central to the subsidiary theme of Accountability Relationships:

### **1. Context Questions**

- What is your understanding of the theme of accountability?
- What accountability procedures are in place for schools?
- What is your view on the importance of reflection, self-evaluation, personal and collective accountability as decreed by the current Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006)?

### **2. Input Questions**

- In what ways are accountability relationships, as presented in the current Education Act, (Laws of Malta, 2006) demonstrated and conducted in the schools?
- The 2006 Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) lays down provisions for 'Internal and External Audits'. How are these being enacted in the Colleges and schools?

### **3. Process Questions**

- Elaborate on the notion of evaluation and reflection currently in practice in the colleges and their schools?
- In what way has the new culture of 'Collective Accountability' affected you and your work?
- Considering the kind of collaboration required by the current Education Act, (Laws of Malta, 2006) what would you say are the implications for accountability relationships within and between the institutions involved? Please elaborate.

#### Appendix 4: The Research Audit Trail

An ‘audit trail documents the stages of a research study’ (Carcary, 2009, p. 20) and could serve as a form of retroactive assessment of the way the research was conducted. Based on Carcary’s (2009) suggestion, the audit trail for this study was as follows:

- **Identifying the research problem:** In 2005 the then Minister of Education, Youth and Employment stated that Maltese Education needed an overhaul if it was to provide quality education that would prepare Maltese students for the 21st Century (MEYE, 2005). The nature of intra- and inter-school networks (later known as Colleges) as proposed in the seminal document *For All Children to Succeed* (MEYE, 2005) and a year later endorsed by the Law – An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327 (Laws of Malta, 2006); the on-going debate that developed and filled the pages of local newspapers, and the comments of the then Minister of Education Youth and Employment that networks (the new learning communities for Malta) would improve the quality and standards of education in Malta because they fostered collaboration (MEYE, 2005) highlighted the need to study and evaluate the proposed school networks and other related reforms. The innovative proposal of a school network system, which had created controversy, underlined the need for the study.
- **The research proposal:** Based on this research problem, I developed a proposal and submitted it to the Director of Studies of the Education Department at the University of Bath for approval. The proposal incorporated an introduction, a presentation of the background and context to the study, the aim and research questions, the research methodology, the time frame for the implementation of the study, and some references.
- **The literature review:** I embarked on an in-depth review of the primary key theme of networking and collaboration in a policy context that required joint working by the individual schools and the implications for the three secondary themes: educational leadership; governance and governing and accountability in the context of such joint working. I framed an understanding that in my research collaboration was an organizing meta-concept, since my study focused on schools and colleges working together. Thus key theoretical perspectives, mainly: Actor Network theory, Activity theory, New Social Movements and Communities of Practice were explored and included in the study. The literature review also highlighted the diversified schools of thought regarding collaboration and isolation, as well as the tension and challenges around collaboration as discussed by various researchers. The literature review also underlined the interactive dimension and challenges of leadership, the contentious issue around the interplay between leadership and management and the concepts of collaborative and distributed leadership, among others. On the concept of governance and governing, particular attention was given to the issues of: governance and centralisation, governance and decentralisation, school governance and models of governance. Finally I explored some of the literature around the concept of accountability, mainly: accountability in schools, accountability in centralised and decentralised systems, and internal and external school auditing.
- **The research framework:** Formulating a research framework meant developing a design that would support the collected data central to both the main research question and three other subsidiary ones. The qualitative educational case study technique, based on three sources (interviewing, observation and document analysis), was considered the best strategy for my study. This technique was chosen because it also involved an interpretive and naturalistic approach towards my data and allowed me to acquire an in-depth understanding of the



perceptions of the educators in the field, and create direct and personal contact with the respondents in their own environment.

- **Research tools employed:**

- (i) **Review of Official Documents:** The seminal document *For All Children to Succeed* (MEYE, 2005) proposed and introduced the whole notion of networking, and initiated the drafting of the new amendments to the Education Act which were later ratified as: *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap.327* (Laws of Malta, 2006). These official documents were reviewed to obtain an understanding of how they were to serve as a launching platform for the proposed innovative reforms that were expected to help Maltese children to succeed and prepare them for the unprecedented global society that awaited them when they came of age.
  - (ii) **Observation Sessions of the College Council of Heads meetings (CCoH):** In total, 15 observational sessions of the monthly CCoH meetings [three in Phase One and 12 in Phase Two] were held. I observed three CCoH meetings in each of the three colleges and six sessions in College One [three in Phase One and another three when revisited in Phase Two]. I attended every CCoH meeting in the capacity of a non-participant observer where every session lasted between three to four hours. A typed version of the amassed observation field notes were presented to the respective four College Principals for their verification, clarification if needed, and approval.
  - (iii) **Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews:** In all, 194 individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews [54 in Phase One and 140 in Phase Two], which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, were conducted. The sampling technique adopted in the research was the non-probability sampling using the convenience and purposive sampling methods. The sampling group was made up of five policy makers, the four college Principals, the Heads of all the Primary and Secondary schools in the four colleges, and a cohort of Primary and Secondary school teachers from each of the four colleges participating in the study. The transcript of each interview was verified by the respective interviewee, while transcriptions of the observation field notes were submitted to the four college Principals for verification and for clarification if needed.
- **Managing and analysing the data:** The analytical process of the collected interview data of Phase One and Phase Two conducted at different stages of the study, involved a number of preliminary steps to the transcription process so as to establish a structured and systemised classification system of the recorded data. The data was copied onto two computer folders in each Phase of the study and marked as 'raw' data folder (used only as a reserve copy of the original content of every interview) and 'working' data folder. Taking the latter data folder to work on, I transcribed all the recorded interviews. After all transcriptions were checked by their respective interviewee for verification, I read through the transcripts several times and selected only significant narratives and discourse. Here, I adopted the selective reading approach to choosing thematic parts of the recordings around the key concepts (collaboration and networking, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between schools) central to the four research questions. I highlighted those parts that were relevant to the already mentioned key concepts and those that kept recurring in various transcripts. In this way I acquired an impression of the important notions, opinions and attitudes of respondents. I reflected on the highlighted interview discourse and narratives that I had isolated and formulated concepts. The rest of the data was stored in a folder for consultation, if the need arose. Satisfied that

what was highlighted captured the essence of my data, I labelled some as themes and others as sub-themes.

The classification and theme establishing procedure that was adhered to for the interview data analysis, was adopted for the observation data, with minor modifications, namely:

- field notes were collected from 15 observation sessions of the CCoH meetings (three in Phase One and 12 in Phase Two) held by the four colleges participating in the study;
- 'cluster' sub-folders were opened;
- typed field notes were handed to the respective College Principal of the four colleges for verification, clarification if needed and approval.

The selective reading approach of the typed and verified field notes was adopted so as to obtain a general sense of the information, to reflect on its overall meaning and to facilitate the selection of thematic statements. Such reflection also helped to separate descriptive field notes (descriptions of the physical setting; accounts of particular events and actions) from reflective field notes (interpreting my account of what I was learning in the inquiry). The careful reading of these notes, complemented by reflection was beneficial for selecting relevant observation data and grouping together similar notes, which were later placed together under the emerging themes and sub-themes.

Part of the analysis process entailed a cross case analysis of the findings. When the analysis of both phases was completed, I took the findings that had emerged from the two phases and adopted the selective reading approach to obtain a general sense of the information. I reflected on its overall meaning and was able to identify elements of cohesion and diversity between the themes and sub-themes that had emerged. Through reflection on consistencies and different stances there emerged instances of different perspective to what was presented by policy documents, what was communicated by the Central Authorities, what was observed at CCoH meetings and what was recorded. These were conceptualised in sub-themes.

- **Presenting the findings and discussion:** The four central themes (collaboration and networking, educational leadership and management, educational governance and governing and accountability relationships within and between schools) and the sub-themes that emerged around them were the basis for presenting the findings and developing the discussion. Reflections on the central themes and sub-themes were beneficial because it provided the basis for developing a model of collaboration at the various levels and pointed to those places where it was working well and where it was not. The findings that emerged were substantiated by citing original interview statements and also content from the field notes of the observation data. When reflecting on the interview, observation and documented data I asked the following questions: What had the data told me? How was I comprehending and interpreting what took place at the time of the interview and observation?
- **Emerging theory:** Further reflections of the findings of each phase and the cross-case analysis took place. These reflections provided the basis for the emerging conclusions structured around the four Research Questions (One Primary and three Subsidiary) giving an

indication as to how the thesis addresses the Research Questions. The conclusion shows how the empirical data links to the key theoretical issues in ways that show the original contribution that the study makes to knowledge. Furthermore, the implications that the findings will have for future research, policy and practice will be highlighted.

## Appendix 5: Relationship of the data and theoretical issues

Theoretical Perspectives	Results	Outcomes
<p><b>1. Theme of collaboration and networking</b></p> <p>Actor Network Theory (ANT)</p>	<p>Central to the theory is the concept of ‘translation’ (the process of establishing identities and the conditions of interaction, Ritzer, 2004, p.2).</p> <p>Organizations are networks of heterogeneous actors (Whittle &amp; Spicer, 2008).</p> <p>ANT explains the organization and stabilization of relationships to create a strong and stable network.</p> <p>The actors need to remain faithful to the network and acknowledge that it is required and needs to be sustained (Ritzer, 2004).</p>	<p>The Act (Laws of Malta, 2006) sanctions the grouping of all State-maintained into 10 Regional Colleges. All Colleges are to adopt a new way of working – intra- and inter-school collaboration that requires joint working by individual schools. This is complemented by my observations of the Council of Heads meetings, a robust exemplar of interaction between the Heads of School within each college.</p> <p>The College Council of Heads is composed of Heads from both the Primary and Secondary sectors.</p> <p>Commitment to the intra- and inter-school joint working endeavour is missing in certain instances among the school practitioners.</p>
<p>Activity Theory (AT)</p>	<p>The basic premise of (AT) is a collective goal-directed activity. The activity is defined as ‘systems of collaborative human practices (Holt &amp; Morris, 1993, p.98).</p> <p>Engeström’s (1999) model of activity system implies that ‘outcome’ is achieved when certain ‘objects’ (e.g. knowledge) needs to be produced.</p> <p>Engeström developed an activity system’s model in which object-orientedness indicates the objective</p>	<p>Networking is still weak and fraught with controversy given the way the different stakeholders view collaboration.</p> <p>Isolation practices are still prevalent in a number of schools.</p> <p>School practitioners still find difficulty in working collegially.</p> <p>Scepticism about the success of the reform is still prevalent among school practitioners because they</p>

<p>Social Capital</p>	<p>of the activity system.</p> <p>The modern conceptualization of social capital underlines the importance of collective action</p> <p>Collectivity is built on trust</p>	<p>are not being consulted.</p> <p>The College Council of Heads is an exemplar of collective action in local colleges.</p> <p>Trust is found to be lacking among certain interviewees. Hence working collaboratively is hindered.</p>
<p>Communities of Practice ( CoP)</p>	<p>A growing number of people and organizations in various sectors are now focusing on communities of practice as a key to improving their performance (Wenger-Trayner, 2006).</p> <p>In communities of practice the members of the community interact and learn together</p> <p>Sveiby and Simons (2002) claims that seasoned members of CoPs tend to foster a more collaborative culture.</p>	<p>Local Policy makers acknowledged that only intra- and inter-school joint working will sustain school improvement and take the Maltese Education system forward.</p> <p>Internal structures are proving to be a barrier to intra &amp; inter school collaboration in a policy context that requires joint working by individual schools.</p> <p>The seasoned members of the Maltese Colleges tend to resist joint working because they feel more secure with the traditional work practices.</p>
<p><b>Subsidiary theme of Educational Leadership and Management.</b></p>	<p>Leaders as change agents.</p>	<p>Certain school leaders fail to be the change agents and help certain school practitioners work according to the collaborative practice as stipulated in the Act (Laws of Malta, 2006).</p>

	Visionary leaders	The study shows that Heads of School are currently not visionary in their leadership as they have to follow top-down directives.
	Collegial leadership	Found lacking amongst certain heads of school, as highlighted by teachers.
	Shared leadership	Bureaucracy still prevalent with consultation, and collaboration between the Heads and the teachers lacking.
	Distributed leadership	Distribution of responsibilities among school practitioners is lacking; focus more on delegation of responsibilities.
	Leadership – the human and moral dimensions	The view of leadership as an outcome of interpersonal relationships founded on trust, openness, treating people with dignity and respect is missing among certain school leaders.
	Overloaded management role	Heads of School felt that their managerial responsibilities increased and was impeding them from mentoring and monitoring novice teachers.
	The college micro-politics	College micro-politics was overshadowed with disappointment. Heads of School claimed that they had limited authority because they had to refer everything to the Principal for approval.
	Having a highly unionized State	The notable monopoly of the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) is damaging the current situation. The MUT is not cooperating with the Directorates by encouraging school practitioners (particularly teachers) to sustain intra- and inter-school joint working between schools.

<b>Subsidiary theme of educational governance and governing</b>	<p>Lack of consultation</p> <p>Lack of clarity around boundaries</p> <p>The College Board</p>	<p>Consultation between Heads and teachers regarding the needs of the school is found missing. It emerges that we are simply paying lip service to decentralization and partnership in governance to making intra- and inter-school joint working a reality.</p> <p>There are problems around the boundaries between the college principal's domain and the Head's domain.</p> <p>The policy to extend governance through the setting up of a College Board has not yet materialised. This is hindering collaboration with the wider community.</p>
<b>Subsidiary theme of accountability relationships within and between institutions involved</b>	<p>Collective accountability</p> <p>Having standard accountability parameters</p> <p>External and internal audits</p>	<p>There is recognition for the need of collective accountability.</p> <p>Accountability standards in the Maltese education system are missing.</p> <p>Internal or external auditing need to be refined.</p>

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